A ROOM IN BERLIN

GÜNTHER BIRKENFELD

TRANSLATED BY ERIC SUTTON

THE OBSERVER says:

"A story of the lower classes, as pathetic as it is frightful. The picture of a mother with her son and daughters is a fine sociological study, written without any political bias."

Königsberger Allegemeine Zeitung:

"Birkenfeld's novel combines the pitiless epic breadth of Zola with the lyrical and dramatic power of Gerhart Hauptmann."

FRANK THIESS,
Author of "The Devil's Shadow"

"The author compels us to like his characters. From the beginning we feel a personal relationship to them, finding their joys and sorrows more stirring than we could have imagined."

The Observer:

"A story of the lower classes, as pathetic as it is frightful. The picture of a mother with her son and daughters is a fine sociological study, written without any political bias."

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A ROOM IN BERLIN

another german novel

JOSEF BREAKS FREE

by Herman Kesten

translated by Eric Sutton

Josef Breaks Free is a very characteristic work of the modern German school, a queer and moving mixture of the comic and the stark. In setting and in the characters involved it has a strange similarity with Birkenfeld's *A Room in Berlin*, but the handling of the two stories is very different.

A ROOM IN BERLIN

(DRITTER HOF LINKS)

by

GÜNTHER BIRKENFELD

Translated from the German

by

ERIC SUTTON

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I

THERE was a children's harvest party that day in the amusement park outside the great city. Paper windmills whirred and little coloured wheels spun round on their tall poles. The deep blue of the sky was flecked with multitudinous many-coloured flags, and paper garlands swung from the vivid green foliage of the fruit-trees and across the hedges. In and out ran the children, a gay white riot of scurrying figures, among the flickering shadows of the tall round sunflowers.

The older girls played for a little while with the little ones; then wandered off arm-in-arm, whispering and giggling.

Lenchen kept close to her friend Lotti who had invited her to the party. "It's lovely to be here with you!" said she, and jumped over a bed of wallflowers, flinging up her short red cotton frock and showing a glimpse of grey combinations: "I should like to come here with you more often."

Her friend stopped in front of a crimson rambler and pulled at the leaves. She was

sorry for Lenchen because her father was dead and her mother was poor. " But," said Lotti Scholtz's parents, " she's such a grubby little creature ! And her hair is always so dirty and untidily cut." It was only because it was a party and Lotti began to cry that she was allowed to ask her friend.

Lenchen noticed her brother Paul standing in a small semicircle of boys, with an air-gun pressed against his cheek. " He looks just like a Red Indian, don't you think ? " said his sister to her friend ; " Paul has such lovely black eyes, and his hair's so soft, like a cat's."

Paul handed over the gun and gleefully hitched up his shiny frayed trousers. His red-feathered dart was in the bull's-eye : he had won ! All the boys yelled with delight, and clapped him on the back, really because someone had won, not because they any of them liked him.

Lenchen picked an aster, ran up to Paul, stuck it in his button-hole, and then reached up and kissed him rapturously on both cheeks. " Hurrah, our Paul's won. What sort of prize do you get ? "

" Another kiss," said her brother gaily : and he picked her up and whirled her round two or three times as though she were still a small girl. The boys looked at her and nudged each other.

From one of the arbours came a rattle of drums : from another the blare of a hunting-horn. Coffee and cakes ! Paul took his sister's arm and walked with her proudly in front of the rest. Behind them came the other boys and girls whispering and jeering. Paul Schwarzer did not care. He was bubbling over with delight. The other boys were used to air-guns, but he, who was just an outsider at the party like his sister, and had never had an air-gun in his hands before, had been the only one to hit the bull's-eye. Paul's little success warmed his heart : he was so used to neglect and contempt because he was out of work.

In the centre of a little rose-bower stood old Kruger, their host. He pinned a silver medal on to Paul's coat, and his daughter put a wreath round Lenchen's hair.

Brother and sister sat down between Herr Kruger and his daughter. They were given coffee and cakes first, and allowed to eat as much as they liked. When Lenchen could eat no more she slipped into a paper napkin what was left on the plate in front of her. Reproachful eyes marked those small hands still muddy from play. " What are you doing ? " whispered Paul, and tried to snatch the package from his sister under the table. Lenchen kept it away from him and tossed

her head: "Stop it! That's for Mother!" Paul blushed, looked down, and all the joy and freedom faded from his eyes.

As evening fell, black and lava-grey storm-clouds began to roll up: and there was a mutter of thunder in the distance. So everything was carried into the shelter of the arbours, and the whole company marched in procession back to the city, the boys with the drums and fifes in front, and after them the little ones carrying gay-coloured Chinese lanterns flickering ominously in the rising wind: then came the youths and girls in two serried troops: and last of all the parents, portly and solemn, many of the mothers with perambulators. It was a ghostly procession of the dying summer: on either side of it towered the desolate cold walls of the great apartment-houses, and above them a leaden strip of sky. The gas lamps were not yet lit. The only light was the red, yellow, and green shimmer of the paper lanterns, which gradually went out one by one. Soon the singing of the little ones could no longer be heard above the hooting of the cars dashing home to escape the storm, the clang of the tram-bells, and all the din of the great streets into which they had now turned. The cold, milky-red glare from the shop windows stripped the magic from the little procession: and it was finally

broken and scattered by the crowd of hurrying passers-by.

Paul and Lenchen went along in silence. The boy felt sad at coming back from that cheerful garden to the great city on that gloomy, thunderous evening. Lenchen held the package close under her bare arm.

They turned down a side-street, and then down others, each one darker than the last, and with more and more children playing and screaming on the pavements. From the open doors of the beer-houses came the din of gramophones and raucous singing. People were sitting on wooden chairs in front of their shops or on iron balconies, enjoying the cool breeze. The storm had passed over and was now rumbling in the distance.

Brother and sister hurried into a dark passageway, from which the plaster was crumbling and peeling off in strips. Lenchen paused and touched her brother's arm:

"What's the matter with you?"

"Why on earth did you want to let those people know we don't get enough to eat?" said Paul, and looked into his sister's face, livid against the darkness under the greenish glimmer of a street lamp. She laughed pertly and flung away from him: but she dropped her eyes before that hard stare, and said more gently:

"I was only thinking about Mother. Don't you suppose she likes something better than bread and margarine day after day: and you know how she loves almond cakes!"

The girl's deep brown eyes began to sparkle again, and she smiled a provoking smile of hers that might be artlessness or insolence, and always made him furious; but he knew he must not fly out at her, and said no more.

They walked across a narrow dark yard smelling abominably of dust-bins; then through another doorway and across a second yard. From the third came the grinding rhythms of a barrel-organ, boisterous shouts, and the flicker of lanterns. Lenchen stuffed the parcel of cakes under her brother's arm and ran on ahead, eager to join the crowd.

The third yard was open at the back, cut off from the yard belonging to the next block by a wooden fence with a few bushes in front of it. Here they could revel to their heart's content. Lanterns swung from cords stretched from the top of the window gratings on the ground floor. Children and grown-ups danced round and round to the tune of the barrel-organ. Franz, the publican from the main street, had contributed a cask of beer. A good many of the company were drunk, staggering about, and leering at the women.

Lenchen danced with Oskar Gellert, who

had been with them at the party in the garden. She was in the wildest spirits, and shouted and clapped whenever the cripple at the organ stopped for an instant. As she danced, she leaned caressingly against her partner's arm, and thrust her knees between his moving legs.

Paul had a choking feeling of disgust: he forced himself not to look at his sister and glanced up from one window to another. In almost all of them there was a light behind the meagre white curtains. Many were open: the older people were leaning on the window-sills looking down into the tumult below. Yet in the centre of the first story were two windows, empty, dark, and uncurtained. In the right-hand one the upper panes had been replaced by a piece of cardboard: and behind the other now appeared a pale face looking faintly pink in the lantern-light. It was his mother: and she nodded to her son.

Paul climbed up the staircase, from which the passage of many feet had long since scraped the paint away. His mother was already wearing their father's great-coat in which she usually slept. She had her son's great dark eyes, but hers were more deeply set. Yet to her children she was never otherwise than placid and good-humoured.

"Well, my dear boy, did you enjoy yourself? You didn't get caught in the storm?"

Paul, who was standing in the doorway, shook his head. "No," he said. "But I won the shooting. Look, here's the medal: I think it's real silver, isn't it? Hans and Oskar were pretty sick! And Lenchen brought this home for you—it's cakes."

"What a kind girl! Now you go and fetch her up, she must be tired. And we'll all eat the cakes before we go to sleep."

When Paul got down to the yard again he did not at first notice his sister. Then he found her by the bushes. Oskar Gellert had her in his arms, and was kissing her neck. The girl's head was bent so far back that the wreath had fallen off her hair.

Paul clenched his fists. Again he felt that choking sensation. Then he stood beside them and shouted: "Stop that!" They did not heed him: so he struck Oskar in the chest, and in an instant the two lads fought wildly until Oskar staggered back, his face covered with blood.

The crowd pressed round the three of them, laughing and shouting: Oskar's father rushed at Paul and roared out in a fury: "You idle blackguard: how dare you strike my son, hey? Wait till you earn as much as he can, you young swine. You get your old mother something better than crusts to eat, before you start throwing your weight about!"

The neighbours all agreed with Herr Gellert. He was their landlord, and of course he must be right.

Paul put his hands in his pockets, drew in his lips as though he were about to whistle, and answered: "Yes, you would throw that up at me, wouldn't you? You're always ready to come to Socialist meetings and weep over the poor down-trodden proletarian, but I'd like to know what you'd do if Mother hadn't got the rent on the first of the month when you come and call for it, smoking your beastly great cigar. . . ." And ignoring the landlord's abuse Paul walked through the groups of murmuring bystanders, who had now turned against Herr Gellert once more and growled a hoarse approval of these sentiments.

On the staircase Paul grabbed his sister by the wrist. "Not a word to Mother, mind!"

The widow had noticed nothing. In the meantime she had made some barley coffee which stood steaming in cups alongside the cakes. The children sat down at the kitchen-table.

"Now we'll have a good feed." The mother laughed her high-pitched, slightly husky laugh. "It's a pity Erna isn't here."

"Gone somewhere with Klappert, I sup-

pose?" asked Paul, munching away at his cake.

"Yes, they were going off for the day."

"I suppose the fellow from the post office will be marrying her soon, won't he?" said the boy abruptly.

The mother drank a mouthful of coffee and licked some almond icing off her thumbs. "Let them have some fun, darling. She sits all the week in her office, she might be allowed to amuse herself on Sundays."

"Oh, I don't mind. . . . All I thought was, Erna's earning good money now, she might give a little to you, I think, instead of spending it all the way she does."

"You've got a grudge against the poor man," said his mother soothingly, now busy at the sink.

"I wouldn't give any away," cried Lenchen suddenly. "When a girl's as old as Erna, she wants all her money for herself. She's got to have nice clothes and pretty things, and patent shoes, and a new hat, and all the rest of it."

"Yes, you know a lot about it, I suppose. Fifteen, aren't you?" And her brother laughed contemptuously.

"Yes, I do know a lot about it. And you needn't put on airs—you're only seventeen, you know. What do you suppose the fellow

will think of her if she isn't decently dressed? A post-office clerk won't go out with a girl that looks like a slavey!"

Paul stood up and stared at his sister so meaningly that she remembered what had happened outside in the yard. She calmed down, but she could not resist saying: "You go out and earn something. You do nothing but loaf around all day reading your old story-books or playing nap with Franz."

Paul grew dark with anger. But there was the bitterness of despair in his voice as he said:

"Well, go and see if you can find a job for me. You know how every one is getting the sack these days; boys who've been to college are walking the streets and starving."

"Now then, children: time to go to bed!" said Mother, and lit the gas.

The three children each had beds of their own with a mattress and a blanket. The widow slept on a mattress on the floor. The rest of the furniture consisted of four chairs, a table, and a battered mahogany cupboard for their clothes. After the father's death everything else had to be gradually sold or pawned.

Paul, whose place was beside the window, lay staring at the ceiling, on which the reflections of the lanterns flickered redly; they were still keeping it up outside the yard, shouting

and singing : and the barrel-organ ground out tunes without a pause.

The boy was still awake when his elder sister came home about three o'clock. She slammed the door carelessly and felt her way, yawning, to her place by the end wall.

The brother noticed that her hair was in disorder and her dress undone in front. Erna sat up for an instant in bed and whispered hoarsely : " How the beastly place smells ! " Then she fell back and was soon fast asleep.

The image of Lenchen leaning against Oskar Gellert's arm and thrusting her knees between his, came involuntarily into Paul's mind. Then he saw Erna, her dress undone, the whiteness of her bare skin, the curves of her breast. She was the kind of girl after whom men would turn and stare thinking : " A nice little piece ! Very nice ! "

Such pictures banished the dismal memories of the evening, and brought him secret joy. It surged within him like the storm-wind in the garden, flared up and coursed through his limbs like molten lead, and made him dizzy . . . and in a little while he fell asleep.

II

On week-days the widow Schwarzer had two jobs in the western district of the city, and on Saturday evening she cleaned a shop. Three times a week she went to the house of Hasselbach the accountant. She liked going there best of all because she could walk the whole way from Moabit through the Zoological Garden. She got up as early as six so as to be able to take her time and sit down on a bench for a little while. She never took a tram—and whatever sort of a day it was, she wore the same short black jacket with puffed sleeves, and carried an umbrella under her arm. Her late husband's elastic-sided boots gave her an awkward heavy gait like that of a sailor after a long voyage.

Frau Hasselbach often commented on the fact that the widow never wore a hat. And yet she was the daughter of a cashier and decently brought up and ought to know what was proper: and she talked and behaved like an educated woman.

"But, Frau Schwarzer," said the account-

ant's lady: "look how it's raining, and here you are again without a hat?" And she fixed her eyes half in amusement and half in contempt on the neatly plaited coil that sat enthroned above the mousegrey wisps of hair hanging damply down over the widow's temples. "Mother Schwarzer's got her little turban on again!" said young Herr Hasselbach, a sharp young law-student.

But the widow always said: "Don't you worry, ma'am: it freshens me up."

She was always cheerful. She was thin and slightly bent, and her face was so worn with trouble that her peaked nose and jutting chin gave her a hawk-like air. The good days of her marriage with Gustav Schwarzer, who had had a prosperous little stone-mason's business until he began to drink and the war came, compensated her for the humiliations and the misery that were now her daily lot.

On the day after the harvest party the Gardens were glistening in the crystalline clearness of early morning, and looked strangely still and solemn. The tree-trunks were dark and soaking from the storm, and the odour of rain still hung about them: their leaves were as green as in the Spring. With her head a little to one side, the widow plodded onwards in her heavy boots along the bright gravel paths under the shadow of the trees,

listening to the twitter of the birds. Then she sat down on her favourite bench and thought of her children, who had been still fast asleep when she left. Paul was looking so pale again : and she hoped Lenchen would not forget the margarine and the jelly. Lutz the grocer would let her have it on credit again. Then she watched the riders as they galloped past her, swaying rhythmically in their saddles. How gay they looked ! The little widow could not help waving to them as they passed ; she did not care whether they waved back again or not.

Then she picked up a bit of meadow-saffron from a flower-bed and put it in her jacket. A park-keeper came up and asked her what she was doing : but the widow said pleadingly : " I want to give the flower to young Fräulein Hasselbach to stick in her fiancé's photograph on her little white writing-table. They're going to be married soon." She made off, and as the keeper could find nothing to reply, he contented himself with stabbing viciously at stray bits of paper with his pointed stick.

There was always much hard work to do at the Hasselbachs' house. They kept no maid. They were being very careful, thought the widow to herself, because the young son was at the University, and Fräulein Lily was going to be married soon : and she would not take

a penny more than she earned. Only the food that was left over, or anything they had not been able to eat, she carried home of an evening in an enamelled saucepan, and warmed up for her children. Paul and Lenchen counted on this and waited for it anxiously. The widow was dreadfully upset when she had to come home without the saucepan and see her children's disappointment. On those occasions she used to delay her journey back, and sometimes loiter so long that, by the time she got home both children had fallen asleep from hunger on the kitchen table.

III

It was nearly midday. Brother and sister were still lying on their beds reading torn paper-back novels with gay and thrilling covers. They had nothing to do, and there was no need to get up. Paul tried a few new streets every day and asked at the workshops whether there was any vacancy for a locksmith's apprentice. But as time went on, the curt "No," and the brusque shake of the head, had become such a torture to him that he felt positively wretched when he thought of going out on the tramp again. So he always put off the dreadful business until later and later, and drowned his boredom and bad conscience in sleep and reading.

Lenchen found the day unbearably tedious. Only when darkness fell did life seem worth living. Until then she lounged about. Brother and sister seldom spoke, and when they did they mostly quarrelled. But Lenchen was usually in the kitchen making herself pretty. She stood on tiptoe in front of the mirror over the sink and smeared her eyebrows, eyelids,

and the corners of her eyes with bits of charcoal, clipped her bobbed hair and combed it busily, and tried the effect of a red slide in different places. And she chattered incessantly to herself: "If he sees me first from the side, I ought to be wearing the slide over my ear. But which ear? Well, every nice boy comes up on the left. So that's that. But I wonder if most of these affairs start that way? Suppose I'm walking along, so——" and she walked across the room with a provoking sway of her hips—"and I see someone following me. That looks all right, so I hurry on a bit—it's a good thing I'm wearing the slide behind to-day. But not so quick that he can't catch up with me pretty soon, and whisper in my ear. I've always wanted to know what men say to a girl; I must ask Paul."

So she jumped on to the edge of Paul's bed and swung her legs. "Paul!"

"Well?" he asked, and went on reading.

"I say, have you ever talked to a girl on the street?"

"Of course I have: dozens!"

"Well, I never! Then please tell me what you say to them!"

"What I say? I say, 'Fräulein, your right foot's behind your left one,' or 'Fräulein, how many miles an hour are you walking?'"

And Lenchen was cross, for she hated to be teased; she went back into the kitchen.

Paul got up and dressed. As he was just going out on his eternal quest, his sister called out after him: "So you won't tell me? All right, then, I'll go and walk down the street and find out for myself."

Paul came back. "You'll do nothing of the kind."

Lenchen slipped past him. "Oh, won't I! I'll go on to the Friedrichstrasse. I know how they walk and look out of the corners of their eyes! And I'll wear my red slide so that they can all see it!"

And so saying she made for the landing. Paul ran after her, pulled her back into the room, and forced her down upon her bed. "I must speak to you seriously, Lenchen," he said. "We haven't talked about yesterday evening yet."

The girl looked up at the ceiling and twiddled her thumbs. "Oh, stop it—I shan't listen."

Paul tried kindness. "Lenchen," he said, "we've often got on so well. And you're only just fifteen. I can't help knowing a bit more about life than you do. You might listen to me quietly."

The girl leaned back against the wall, and began to hum, as she pulled her skirts down.

" I know a fine job for you, Paul. You ought to become a clergyman. You can talk people silly like they do."

The boy lost patience. " Shut your mouth," he cried. " I'm saying what must be said to you, and you've got to hear it. After that you can go to hell your own way, for all I care. Very well, then ; you know how poor we are. Mother works herself to death, but my out-of-work pay and what she earns are only just enough for the rent and the gas. Soon there won't be any money coming in at all. The awful thing about being poor is that if you don't keep your pride you're downhill before you know it. And I've seen the way you're going for a long time. You've heard about girls who sell themselves and you think that would be a way to earn money easily and get us out of the mud. But you're all wrong. Just imagine what it would be like to have a different man make love to you every day. And then for a week you mightn't find anyone. And what will become of you later on ? You'll have learnt nothing, and decent people won't know you. You'll have to sell matches or get a job in a public lavatory : that is, if you aren't in hospital. Those are the stories I always heard when I was an apprentice : so you listen to me, and think it over. Why don't you try and earn a

few marks as a nursemaid or a mother's help?"

"Nursemaid? Don't be a fool, Paul. I'd sooner jump into the canal. And I'll do it soon, I can tell you! I'm fed up with all this." And she burst into tears.

Paul felt sorry for her once more. He stroked her hair and patted her soothingly on the shoulder.

Suddenly Lenchen jumped up and flung away from him. Her face was drawn with hatred. "Take your hand away! I'll have nothing to do with you. You're . . . you're jealous! You want to keep me for yourself. I know the way you look at me! But I don't want a boy-friend like you—with frayed trousers, and always in bed, and biting his nails. I'd sooner go out on the loose and find one for myself."

Paul raised his arm as though to strike his sister, but dropped it and stepped back. His eyes clouded and he stared at the floor. "How can you say such a thing, Lenchen?" he said.

"Well, why did you hit Oskar in the face, I should like to know?"

"Because I couldn't bear to see you acting like that—I knew how it would end."

"Liar!" The girl stood square in front of him, looked him up and down contemptuously and spat in his face.

Paul forgot himself, seized a chair, and hurled it at her with a yell of rage. But his sister was already outside: he could hear her laughter on the stairs.

He was deeply shaken, and stood for a while without moving: then he sank on to the chair that he had flung at the girl in his fury and pressed his fists against his cheeks. . . . The awful thing was that she was right. Always between Erna and Lenchen in the same room—it was enough to drive a fellow mad! Tears came into his eyes. He slowly wiped them away with the backs of his hands and went downstairs into the café.

Hans and Wilhelm were sitting there and playing dice. They, like Paul, were out of work, except that they liked their state, and took no steps to change it. They could sleep and loaf just as they pleased. Every Saturday they drew their dole like a retired gentleman calling for his pension. And if that was not enough it could be supplemented with a little skill from hawkers' barrows, fruit stalls, and post-office counters. These were easy and profitable pursuits. Why wear oneself out when money could be picked up on the pavements? Only five fingers were needed for the purpose.

The three lads fell to playing nap. Hans and Wilhelm were annoyed at having

to play for nothing because Paul had no money.

"You're so beastly haughty," jeered Hans. "Why don't you make some money like we do? All this sort of talk won't fill your mouth, will it? I don't think!"

"No, you will do no good for yourself, Paul, my lad," observed Wilhelm. "You're an old woman, that's what you are!"

Paul said nothing, but went on playing without pleasure or interest and lost consistently: until the two others flung their cards in a fury on the table and departed.

The publican came up behind the boy and laid a great hand on his shoulder. "That's right enough, what they've been saying to you. Don't you be a young fool, now. When the rich people let us poor devils go hungry, you show them you're not to be put upon—take what you can get."

Paul shook his head.

The publican bent down to Paul's ear and whispered: "I've got a nice little job on hand one of these nights. Just the sort of thing for a handy young chap like you. And I'd see you don't lose by it—you could trust me, eh?"

Paul got up. "No, thank you. Try Hans and Wilhelm: they're more in your line."

And he went off to hunt for work, weary

and indifferent: and he turned away with a "Thank you," even before the refusal was uttered.

At last he sat down vacantly on a bench by the canal, folded his arms close against his stomach—for he was hungry, and looked down at the houses, and square interspaces full of romping children. Misery—helpless, squalid misery. Hell. And above them shone the vault of heaven.

Wilhelm had told him he was no use. It was true: he could not bring himself merely to rag about until he could climb to the heaven that was his.

IV

MEANTIME Lenchen, with a very peevish look upon her face, was sauntering along the breathless streets. She had no use for daylight: nothing interesting happened then, and if it did, every one was in such a hurry. The asphalt pavement was as soft as wax from the heat. Lenchen stamped her feet as she walked so that her soles left a print. It was, after all, something to do! Perhaps as a result of these footprints of hers, some unemployed would be put on to take up the pavement with a drill, relay and tar it over: which would be a good thing for some one! Her thoughts wandered to Paul. She felt quite ill when she thought of what had happened just now. Paul had always meant well by her—he was a kind boy. But he ought to give up his beastly preaching! Nursemaid, indeed! When she could have some fun and go with a rich friend to Paris. . . . She wondered if Paul were in love with her. This idea gave Lenchen a warm feeling and she lingered over it. Still, she had only taunted him with being

jealous of Oskar because he had made her angry, and wanted to make him angry too. But Paul was a nice boy—and a fine big lad. She saw her brother as he stood at the sink in the morning, with only his trousers on, pouring water over his chest and shoulders. What muscles he had! Why didn't he become a boxer? She loved boxers. Tight white shorts and bull-muscles damp with sweat. She would tell him he must become a boxer. . . . Then she began to wonder whether Paul really knew a dozen girls or only one. And how did he treat her? She knew the talk, she had heard it from friends and from Erna, but it did not convey much to her. It was too bad that she couldn't find out what really went on. Was it true what Paul had said about the women in the streets? They all looked so lovely and smart, she thought. If only she could get a few pence from Mother, she could buy herself some rouge. The ladies in their cars and on the films were all marvellously rouged. That was the game! After all, if no one would tell a girl anything, she must look after herself!

Absorbed in these reflections, Lenchen stood peering into the perfumers' and hairdressers' shops, and then lingered outside jewellers, milliners and dressmakers. In her imagination she constructed a magnificent evening

toilette out of the costliest articles in the various shop-windows, and began to carry her head as though she already felt the black spangled cap against the tips of her ears, and moved her arms in languid undulations so that all might marvel at the deep folds of glittering gold lamée hanging from her shoulders. And she swayed delicately along the pavement-edge, as though her heels were very high, right past Herr Lutz's store where she was to buy margarine and plum jelly on credit.

A man passer-by accidentally bumped into that great lady, Lenchen Schwarzer. She recoiled and hissed out: "How dare you, sir?" and fled into the bustle of the moving crowd, convinced that the man would follow her. But, alas! she waited in vain at the next corner and stamped her feet in fury.

"Oh, I'm a stupid little fool! And I've forgotten to go to Lutz's."

V

It was fortunate that late that evening the mother came home carrying the grey enamel saucepan : Paul and Lenchen had been waiting for it, weary and sullen with hunger. The saucepan contained horsebeans and a few bits of pork. The children gulped down the tepid food in such a hurry that they felt ill and had to go and lie on their beds.

In the meantime Erna had been eating her bread and meat. Every evening she brought home with her a quarter-pound of mixed cold meat, which she consumed alone and with avidity : not even the rinds were left. Mother drank only a little coffee. She had had some bread and butter and cheese at the Hasselbachs' house.

Erna was an independent character and stood like a stranger between her mother and the two younger ones. She was fair, with greenish-blue vacant eyes, and sharp-cut features. Lenchen was small and delicate, and Paul, though strong, had not much flesh on him : but the elder sister had a full,

powerful figure, and was almost too stout and deep-bosomed for her twenty years.

Erna picked her teeth, crossed her arms across the kitchen table, and breathed deeply several times as though she had something to say: but she was silent.

"Not tired yet?" said her mother, and began to get the wash-tub ready.

"Can I have my blouse by Wednesday? The one with the lace cuffs?"

"I'm just doing it," said her mother, nodding. "If it goes on keeping fine, I shall be able to iron it to-morrow evening."

"It's the post office dance on Wednesday. I ought to have new stockings too, but I can't be always begging from Max."

The widow went to her jacket and came back to the kitchen table with a small knitted purse. "I got four marks to-day: here are two."

"What can I get for that? It's not enough for the cheapest artificial silk ones."

The mother's fingers hesitated for a moment in the purse. Then she produced another mark.

"Right!" said Erna, putting the money in her bag. "And now I've got something to tell you. I'm going to have a baby."

The mother turned round from the wash-tub and looked at her: "When, Ernchen?"

"In six months or so."

"Yes, I've noticed you being sick and looking pale for some time now. I began to think something was wrong. Can't you marry before it happens?"

The girl was silent for a time. There were evil lines about her mouth. "I haven't spoken to Klappert about marriage yet. His father is an accountant: and his people are very high and mighty. They'll want something very special in the way of a daughter-in-law, and they certainly wouldn't want me. Why should they? My father was a stone-mason, and he's dead: my mother's a charwoman; and my brother's out of work. One room and a kitchen. Third court on the left. Max makes faces every time he comes to fetch me: and his people have never thought of inviting me to the house yet. They don't know about me. I'm just good enough for a little hotel bedroom in the Münzstrasse!"

"What does Max say? Is he glad?"

"He? He's not going to know anything about it! That would be the end of love. I should get the boot. Men want their pleasure —that's all. The rest they kindly leave to us."

"Now, now, Ernchen," said her mother soothingly in her husky voice, as she soaped and rubbed the clothes on the grooved iron slab. "You must have the baby here, then. Lenchen can look after you nicely."

"Here! Well, that's the limit! Where, I should like to know? And a fifteen-year-old midwife! Why, you can be put in gaol for that! Well, the very idea!"

"Don't shout so, Erna. The children will wake up. . . . Very well then, I can stay at home for a few days and see to everything. And Paul and Lenchen can sleep in the kitchen for the time. We shall manage all right. . . . And now you go to sleep. You need a lot of rest now."

The girl got up heavily, said good night with a yawn, and slouched into the other room.

The mother bent over the wash-tub, rubbing the garments against the iron slab and dipping them into the foaming suds. Now and again she tossed a wisp of grey hair back from her forehead.

VI

Paul was sitting at the kitchen table holding a small black-framed picture in his hands. It was a bright Sunday morning in late August.

"Father has been dead a year to-day," said Paul to his mother, and stared at the face of the dead man under the field-grey cap. Erna had his eyes and the hard lines of his face.

Their father had died from the effects of gas-poisoning during the war. The boy could see his mother sitting on the sick man's bed,—it was the one in which Paul now slept,—and holding his hands as he lay dying. At that time Paul still had to share a mattress with Lenchen. They lay huddled together and looked with horror at Father's face which had fallen feebly to one side. Lenchen, digging her chin into her brother's shoulder, shivered violently and kept saying: "What is it? is Father going to die?" until Paul put his hand over her mouth. Once more Father's eyelids quivered and opened: and a few tears trickled from beneath them. His vacant gaze quested round the room and finally on his wife, who was looking quite

calmly down upon the dying man. "Martha," —the words came painfully,—"why must I leave you alone? What will become of you all?" . . . The mother stroked his cheeks softly, and said: "Go to sleep quietly, dear. All your troubles and sorrows will soon be over. You won't be worried any more. And we shall meet again, and both be cheerful when we do. Perhaps as butterflies, eh? I often think we shall be gay butterflies in the next life. . . ." Then there was a movement on the pillow like a nod: and then silence. Into this silence—it was then late at night—had come Erna, excited and flushed from an expedition with Klappert whom she had not long met.

"Shan't we go to Father's grave to-day?" asked Paul.

"Let Father rest in peace," said Mother; "he lies so nicely under the cypresses and the ivy. We should only disturb him with our loud voices and our troubles. . . . We might go out to Tegelort, to the 'Tivoli'; Father used to like going there. This month two years ago was the last time we were all there together. I remember Father played with you in the sand and made a hill with a clown's face on top of it. He was so clever at that kind of thing."

VII

So, in the early morning, they all took the train to Tegelort—Mother, Paul and Lenchen. Erna had come home late on the Sunday evening and was still asleep.

The "Tivoli" is an open-air swimming-bath on the Heiligensee, with a restaurant attached. From a distance all they could see was a tumult of bare limbs and bodies: only when they came nearer could they distinguish the vivid reds, blacks, greens, and all the motley hues of the bathing suits and wraps. A great coloured wheel turned slowly in the breeze. The bathers in their yellow gondolas floated under the blue of heaven like gods in an earlier world. The whine of barrel-organs, the rasping rhythms of a gramophone from the bathing-master's cabin, and the nasal roar of loud speakers, rang out above the muffled hum of many hundred human voices. The barrows of ices, lemonade, and fruit, with their blue and white striped awnings, were the only resting-places for the eye in all this bustle and din of colours, voices, and moving figures.

Lenchen, in a ragged old costume, waded up to her knees into the lake, and was soon splashing water at a sun-tanned lad near-by: and the next moment they were romping and bathing together.

Paul swung himself for a while on the parallel bars. His triangular bathing drawers were too tight and cut into his flesh so that the muscles stood out sharply.

Mother sat on the sand, with her umbrella open against the burning sunshine, and enjoyed all the boisterous uproar round about her.

Paul jumped off the parallel bars and hurried towards his sister. "Come along," he shouted, "I'll teach you how to swim!"

Lenchen did not hear. She went on bathing gaily with her boy-friend, who had such marvellous fair hair. They tumbled over each other like otters in the water.

Paul shouted again: and Lenchen reluctantly left her gambols. Her friend had such nice hair and was so strong: and it was so lovely to feel his bare young body against her own. It was just because he was wet and cold that the touch of his firm flesh against hers was so exciting! . . . Still, she quite liked learning to swim, and the feel of her brother's hands as he held her up. And she obediently bent and stretched her arms and legs just as Paul told her.

Near them stood a lady in short black drawers, white varnished belt, and a black and white check tunic. She was languidly smoking a cigarette and staring down at Paul, who was standing rather further out and bending over Lenchen.

The boy looked up, and caught a flicker in the lady's eyes. She came a little nearer, and said: "Can you swim well?"

"Oh yes," said Paul; and was so astonished at the question that he forgot all about Lenchen and stood up straight. The girl went under, struggled and splashed, and finally found her feet. She coughed and spat, and shrieked for her brother, who took no more notice of her.

"I'm looking for someone to swim to the opposite side with me," said the lady, whom Paul had never seen in his life before. But she must, he thought, be a real lady, because she wore a number of glittering rings, and a gold bracelet on her upper arm.

"Go along to Mother. You've been long enough in the water," said Paul to his sister, who had not yet quite recovered herself. And to the stranger: "Right, I'm ready."

"Oh, come; you must wait until I've finished my cigarette," said the lady, laughing, and rocking slowly from one leg to the other: she stared after Lenchen, who was stamping

off in a fury. "Odd sort of costume that girl's wearing," she said.

Paul looked at his sister's shapeless patched bathing dress, blushed and was sulkily silent.

"Come on, then," said the strange lady, flung herself forward into the water and started with a dashing overarm stroke.

Paul had a struggle to keep up with her: but when they were half-way across, the lady grew less strenuous, turned on her back and propelled herself gently forward with her legs. The boy swam beside her, using a breast stroke.

The strange lady watched him: Paul felt her eyes upon him, and looked round at her more than once. She had very bright light-blue eyes, and a large mouth with full lips. Her face was rather heavy and lightly sprinkled with freckles. When she smiled two dimples appeared in her cheeks, which gave her an air of friendly condescension.

"How old are you?" asked the strange lady.

"Seventeen."

"You look older."

"And you?" asked Paul, with a powerful sweep of his arm to keep himself level with her. There they were—those merry dimples in her cheeks! The lady was so amused that her whole body positively quivered in the water.

Paul, too, felt gay, and he laughed so much that he could hardly swim, and felt a pricking in his armpits.

Suddenly the lady stopped laughing and peered roguishly at the boy's profile : his nose bobbed up defiantly out of the water at every stroke.

"Very well," said she. "You've swum along with me so nicely, that I'll tell you. I'm just the same age as my husband."

Suddenly the boy's nose dipped beneath the surface, and he struck out wildly with his head down and his heels out of the water.

Fortunately they were nearing the shore, and were now in their depth. The boy's arms hung exhausted at his sides and his face was blue as he stumbled ashore. He sat down at once on the sand without looking at the lady.

She walked nonchalantly up to him. The long swim did not seem to have affected her. She stood over her companion, pulled off her black helmet-shaped india-rubber cap and shook the water off it.

"How silly of us not to bring some cigarettes!" she said.

Paul stared through her legs that looked thick and heavy against the glittering surface of the lake.

"Quite exhausted, my friend?"

"No, not a bit," said Paul.

"Then what's the matter?"

Paul began to draw patterns in the sand with a little piece of stick, and unconsciously he drew squares with a half-circle over them —houses, and the sky of the great city. "Doesn't your husband bathe, then?" he asked after a while, with his chin resting on his up-drawn knees.

"Why, yes!" said the lady with a ripple of laughter; this question, too, seemed to tickle her. "My husband often bathes, and he adores swimming. But at the moment he is away in Switzerland."

Paul jabbed his stick into each of the squares, one after the other. A very entertaining game,—he felt he could go on playing it for hours! If only his hand would not tremble so: that came from swimming so far.

"Are you cold?" asked the lady and crouched beside him on the patch of grass. There was something motherly in her question. "Perhaps I shouldn't have made you swim so far."

She looked at his gaunt body, and, as he sat panting beside her, she could see the deep folds of the skin between his ribs. And how thin his legs were! He reminded her absurdly of Jochanaan in *Salome*.

"Are you sure you aren't cold?" she asked once more: and Paul shook his head curtly.

"Well, I think you might be a little more amusing," said the lady, in a tone of good-humoured complaint. "Tell me your name, anyhow."

Paul did so, and in reply to further questions told her about his family and himself.

Once again the lady surveyed his clear-cut profile, and she said, "There aren't any social distinctions between people in bathing dresses: the only point is whether they're good looking or not. I like you,—you're a very handsome boy, Paul."

He looked questioningly into her eyes, and doubt and mistrust passed like shadows across his face. Suddenly he said abruptly: "What do you want from anyone like me?"

The lady merely laughed, stretched herself on the warm sand, pushed the straps off her shoulders and loosened her white belt.

The boy watched the quiet rise and fall of her breasts, and the curve of her body below as it filled out and sank.

It was not the woman's form that conquered him: he had often seen his sisters naked. No, it was the rhythmical movement of her breathing body. This struck the seventeen-year-old lad as something almost

solemn, as a mysterious, overmastering force: she seemed like an animal whose eyes could draw him on, and he the victim, with freezing pulses, yet glad to fall beneath those claws.

"What is this place, anyway?" asked the lady, with closed eyes, brushing away a fly.

"It's a sort of island," said Paul, and added softly, without quite knowing why: "No one comes here. The path goes through the wood at the back. We often used to play robbers and Indians here when we were children."

"I suppose you were always one of the Indians, weren't you?"

Paul saw that she was amused by some thought that had just occurred to her.

"No, I wasn't. I was always the robber chief."

He felt a hot, quick hand round his wrist. "So that's what you're like. I suppose I ought to be very frightened of you, then!"

Paul burst into what was intended to be a harsh and threatening laugh, so that the lady should be really frightened: but it was a failure. He was so excited by the hand clasping his wrist, that all he could produce was an unconvincing "Ha-ha!" He did not notice that the lady had used the familiar "du" to him.

And as the strange lady said in a voice that trembled a little: "You can come a little nearer, if you like . . ." he was upon her like a beast upon its prey. And as he clutched her, his nails drove into her shoulders.

"Oh, you robber chief! you little ruffian," she shrieked and beat at him with her fists.

Her playful resistance drove the boy into a blazing, savage fury. She fought like a twisting, struggling cat, but he beat her down. At last, with a gasp of surrender the lady took his head in her two hands, laid her mouth to his, and with her lips drew out all the burden and weariness of his soul. And as he laid his slim form beside hers he resolved to be rid, once and for all, of the creature he had known as Paul Schwarzer.

Soon the scorching heat of early afternoon awakened the two sleepers.

The lady sat up, peevishly put her bathing costume straight, and said curtly: "We must get back now."

Paul felt so joyfully grateful to his companion that he did not notice her coldness, but said, in the friendly tone that he fancied the occasion warranted: "Must we,—already?"

"Of course." The strange lady got up.

" Besides, you ought not to be away from your mother so long."

His mother? . . . The boy felt as if she had boxed his ears.

The lady was already in the water and swimming off. Paul followed her. Anger began to rise within him,—a grinding feeling of revolt. Not against the lady, nor against himself,—he had said and done nothing that could have given offence. He was angry simply because he had to swim back, chilly and alone, further and further from the island, on which for two hours he had ceased to be a starving, workless slum-boy—ceased, indeed, to be an individual at all, and had become a kinsman of trees and water, of the sand and sun, and of this woman. He thought of the sky over the great gloomy city, and his eyes filled with tears.

Near the swimming-bath by the lake-edge, surrounded by the surging, shouting throng, the lady stood waiting for him: and in her eyes, too, was a look of regret. She said: " Ring me up some time; " and gave him the number, without any other farewell than a brief handshake.

Paul wandered up and down in the water. He felt he could not go straight to his mother and to Lenchen. For a time he was lost in his recollection of the hours on the island,

and looked across at it with a friendly greeting in his eyes . . . then he felt wounded by the coldness of their parting, and stood watching her cabin-door. But the lady did not come. She must have gone out by the other side and left the place already.

Lenchen came up, peering suspiciously at her brother. She was still in a bad temper. Her whole day had been spoilt. He was a brute, she told him; first he had nearly let her drown, and had then swum off with a strange lady and taken no more notice of her. He was a fine sort of brother! Unfortunately Fritz—that was the fair-haired boy—had to go home at midday. The only comfort was that she had arranged to meet him again. Paul wasn't to be depended on—that was quite clear. He simply behaved as if she wasn't there. And Lenchen pinched him savagely on the leg.

Paul retaliated by pulling her hair and went off to Mother.

She was delighted that he had had such a good swim, in such pleasant company. No, she hadn't been nervous: and she gave him his slice of bread and margarine.

Paul ate it hungrily and said: "Now let's go. It's too crowded and dusty here."

Lenchen sulked: she said it was just beginning to be nice.

But Paul dressed without saying anything more, and their mother was also glad to get home before the trams were quite full.

VIII

The barren day was now full of a music that held Paul spell-bound. It was like a light that slowly swallowed up the darkness. All people and all things gradually moved into the circle of that splendour and showed a different aspect.

Paul was very gentle to Lenchen and listened patiently to her complaints, so full of all the vanity and greed of her fifteen years. That was natural to her age, he thought, and scolded her no more.

But the first night after that Sunday was torture. The anguish of parting was upon him: then he forgot it in the memory of those hours on the island. "You're a handsome boy, Paul," she had said, clasping his wrist. She had not been angry with him for his savage conduct. All this gave him a feeling of assurance and courage. The strange lady had acknowledged him. His was no longer an existence forgotten and obscure: he was taken up into the company of those who are masters of the day and its delights.

It was easy now to bear the daily refusals on his hunt for work, and easy to bear his hunger when Mother came home without the enamel saucepan. Paul now helped her as much as he could. He felt he was now some use in the world, a man of some account. He got up earlier, usually when Erna did, washed himself carefully and took great pains to keep his hair clean. He mended his father's blue jacket, and made it as neat as possible; and he trimmed the frayed edges of his trousers. He began to look for other work—after all locksmiths' apprentices were not the only people in the world. "No, you are too late," they said at the Labour Exchanges, "there is nothing at the moment." So Paul left his name and called regularly to inquire.

Lenchen was very anxious to know what the strange lady had said to him, and what they had been doing all that time. Paul explained that they had lain on the sand and looked for sand-eels. His sister laughed knowingly. Still, that was all she could get out of her brother. Then she grew spiteful and said:

"I met Fritz yesterday. He is such a nice boy. He bought me an ice up in the bazaar and kissed me on the arm as we came out."

The girl expected that Paul would burst out into another tirade. But he did not:

he was merely amused. He pointed out that Fritz ought not to kiss her on the arm. Real gentlemen kiss a lady's hand.

"Yah! I've found you out!" cried his sister triumphantly and danced solemnly round the room. Paul pinched her and took himself off. He no longer played nap. Hans and Wilhelm were no fit company for him, they were always up to some dirty business with the publican. Nor did Paul even care to see his fat young friend Franz.

In the afternoon Lenchen met Fritz again. He was the son of a hall porter, helped his father to beat the carpets, and earned some pocket-money by running small errands. And the tenants, who liked him, gave him something now and then.

Fritz was short and thin for his seventeen years, but he was a wiry little fellow and up to all sorts of tricks. This had been one of his latest: he made a number of rough cardboard skulls and ribs, rubbed them over with a lump of magnesium, which made them look a livid green in the darkness: then he took them out into the courtyard at midnight, and to an accompaniment of hollow groans brandished the ghosts on two long sticks. The tenants flung open their windows and screamed. Fritz made off at the right moment, for Major Schneider of the first floor came to the window

with a revolver and fired off the whole magazine. It was the Major, too, who discovered the originator of the ghosts next day, and as a reward for the boy's impudence, and in remorse for his performance with the revolver, slipped three marks into his hand. Fritz was accordingly much elated, as this meant he could now take Lenchen to the cake-shop. He put on his smartest outfit: a light-yellow suit, blue sweater, and a sailor's cap.

They met at the appointed corner. Lenchen had shortened her skirt as much as she could. Beneath her white blouse could be seen a chemise edged with lace. The red slide was over her left ear.

Fritz once more tried to imprint a passionate kiss on her arm, but Lenchen waved him away: "No, Fritz, that's not the proper thing to do:" and she graciously offered him her hand.

Fritz, who did not like being put right, squeezed her hand so hard that Lenchen screamed.

Then they went arm-in-arm to the café. They were both very proud to be there, and took pains to be excessively refined. Lenchen made Fritz give her his handkerchief under the table and turned away to blow her nose. Her friend picked a sweet-pea out of the little vase and handed it to Lenchen to put into her

dress. Their endearments were limited to rubbing their knees together and affectionately tickling the palms of each other's hands. When anyone came by, they sprang apart and said: "Yes, quite;" or "How marvellous!"

Lenchen told Fritz about Paul, and how he wouldn't say what had happened with the strange lady: and they both laughed meaningly.

Lenchen thought she must do something to please Paul and so induce him to "confess." The word "confess" had survived from her Catholic confirmation. For Lenchen was a Catholic like her father; Paul and Erna were Protestants like their mother. Lenchen had indeed often been to the Evangelical Services, but she had wanted to be confirmed as a Catholic. Catholic girls are grown up when they are twelve, Protestant girls not until they are fifteen. Three years to the good, she thought! . . . "Yes, our Lenchen is getting a big girl now," said the widow to Frau Hasselbach, who as a strong Protestant was indignant that she had allowed her daughter to be confirmed in the Catholic Church.

So Lenchen wanted to get her brother to confess. And she said to Fritz: "I'm so wretched about Paul. He's got no work and

no money. If only someone would help him to earn ever so little!"

Fritz was touched by this generosity and pondered deeply. Suddenly he burst into a cheerful whistle: "I know what! Just now, as I was going through the Chausseestrasse, I stopped to look at a fellow who was selling hair-dye from a barrow and telling a long yarn about it. . . . Look here, your brother's got dark hair, hasn't he?"

"Marvellous black hair, and ever so silky!"

"Well, as soon as this fellow noticed me he jumped off his barrow, took me aside and simply said, "How much do you want?" I found out after a bit that he was looking out for someone to sit on his barrow who had hair exactly the colour that his dye was supposed to produce. As there was nothing doing, he begged me to look for two boys, one fair like me and another with patent-leather black hair. He said he'd pay well."

They both ran at once to the Chausseestrasse. There was the dye-merchant sure enough, and hardly had he recognized Fritz's fair hair than he almost jumped down on him.

"Well?" said he. "Have you thought better of it?"

"No," said Fritz: "I haven't. But I've found your black-haired lad for you."

"But he'll cost you a lot," broke in Lenchen.

" He's an assistant at a first-class hair-dresser's. He won't come under a mark an hour ! "

The dye-merchant waved his hands frantically : " A mark an hour ! The best of them don't pay that. Can't be done."

He clambered up on the barrow again. The pair stood quietly by and listened. As the offices were shut, there were many girls, and quite a number of youths, gathered round the artist.

" Wash your hair three times thoroughly with this tincture, ladies and gentlemen, and the fairest hair will go black ; and, though you won't believe me, I daresay, you can dye red hair and white hair the same way. I'll give fifty marks to any of you who can prove I've said too much. Every young lady wants to be a vamp these days : but if she hasn't got a single black hair, how is she going to manage it, eh ? She must wash her hair three times with my *Tinctura Obscura*, famous over all the world, and her fortune is made."

" Oh, go on ! " interrupted Fritz : " show how it's done first."

The dye-merchant gave a flying leap from the barrow, and whispered to Fritz : " Do you want to ruin me . . . say fifty pfennigs an hour ! "

Fritz and Lenchen flatly refused and turned

to go. But the merchant was after them. "Sixty pfennigs,—that's my last word!"

"We'll speak to our friend," said Fritz over his shoulder, "and let you know early to-morrow morning."

Paul did not get back until late in the evening: and Fritz and Lenchen waited in a fever of exultation at the surprise they had in store for him. But the time went slowly. They fell to kissing, and their kisses grew more and more violent. Then Fritz wanted to go further, but Lenchen was afraid.

"Oh, no, no,—suppose something happened: and I'm not that sort of girl anyway!"

But . . . Suddenly Paul's step was heard on the stairs, and they sprang apart.

At first Paul would not listen to the offer that they produced with such an air of patronage. He was in a bad temper again for the first time since Sunday: and he was not at all grateful to Fritz and Lenchen. It annoyed him to find this fair-haired little fool alone with his sister. However, he said nothing about that: he flung out irritably: "I'm not going to sit on a barrow like a performing monkey! And suppose someone found out that my hair wasn't dyed?"

Fritz observed that these scruples were "simply grotesque": he had learnt from

one of the tenants at home, an official of the Education Office, to describe anything not quite to his liking, as "simply grotesque." Lenchen was furious at her brother's abominable ingratitude. But they would not be put off. They pointed out that the people round the barrow would be just girls and their boy-friends who all believed in hair-dyes, and even if the fraud came out, only the merchant would be liable. And . . . sixty pfennigs an hour! Why, for nine hours that came out at five marks forty a day! He could soon buy himself a suit and all sorts of things that he must have before he could go and see his lady friend.

It was, of course, Lenchen who played this last trump, and it succeeded. Paul gave way at once; he even thanked them, and faithfully promised to take them to the circus when he got a little money.

Next morning all three of them went round to the Chausseestrasse. The dye-merchant could hardly conceal his satisfaction at Paul's hair. It was exactly the colour of his *Tinctura Obscura*, and besides he was a really ornamental youth. Fritz had lent his friend a cast-off suit that had belonged to the Major's son: it was rather threadbare, but well-cut and made of good tweed.

The dye-merchant at first tried to haggle:

fifty pfennigs an hour! Paul would very likely have accepted, but Fritz and Lenchen at once took his arms, and threatened to break off negotiations. "All right, all right, you needn't go away," shouted the merchant; "sixty pfennigs is a shameful price, but I'll pay it." He had in the meantime obtained a concession for a much more populous corner on the Friedrichstrasse, and was relying on Paul's admirable head of hair.

Paul now sat on the barrow from nine in the morning until seven at night, with a short interval in the middle of the day in which he could stretch his legs. It was not an exhausting occupation, and not so unpleasant as he had thought: though it would not be very agreeable in very cold or very hot weather.

The merchant did a very brisk trade. He re-christened Paul, Paolo Nigrinus, at the suggestion of a disreputable acquaintance of his who happened to be a student of theology: and Paul was placarded under this name in the merchant's booth, and on the boards carried round the streets by sandwich-men. He became all the rage among the shop-girls and cashiers of the district: they gobbled up their lunches to go out and admire this irresistible young man. His hair was quite too marvellous, they said. The merchant ran

his fingers through it, held it up in thick meshes, and then smoothed it out again.

"Paolino's hair, ladies and gentlemen," said he, "was still auburn a few weeks ago. When it had been washed three times with *Tinctura Obscura* it was a beautiful glossy black. You can kiss it and stroke it as much as you like, ladies! You can wash Paolino's head fifty times a day, and his hair would still be black."

And to prove what he said, at the end of every performance—and indeed he now conducted his business on these lines—he vigorously shampooed Paul's hair. "Come along, ladies, you can pull Paolino's hair if you like—he doesn't mind, he's never kissed a girl yet! Well? Still black, isn't it?"

All the young ladies had to admit that it was, and at once bought two bottles of the magic dye.

Paolo Nigrinus was the sensation of the neighbourhood. Some of the women would slip little folded notes under his stool, which usually ran: "I shall expect you this evening without fail at so-and-so:" and under the message a girl's name, often encircled by a drawing of linked hearts or garlands. And such burning eyes devoured him every day!

Paul felt himself proof against this general admiration. He had his own lady: and he

carried her adored image in his heart. He often hardly realized what was going on around him: he did not notice when another affectionate note was pushed under his seat. He was thinking of her whom, in the silence of his heart, he called his beloved. It was for her sake that he sat perched up on his seat, listened to the merchant's encomiums and let him shampoo his hair. He would not carry on a day longer than was necessary. He must put by just enough for a new outfit, with something over for chocolates and flowers.

The only thing that made his situation uncomfortable was the fear that his beloved might one day pass the corner where he sat. But he was spared this humiliation: she would, he thought, live in a more aristocratic part of the town.

After a month he had collected enough money to get himself a dark suit and various necessary matters. He looked so distinguished in his fine clothes that Lenchen was violently smitten by him, and could only comfort herself with the thought that her brother belonged to someone else and that she could never find in him what she had found in Fritz. Since Paul had been sitting on the dye-merchant's barrow, Fritz had come to see her almost every day. Indeed, she could not bear

sitting at home by herself. One caress had led to another: Fritz, who was not without experience, had overcome her scruples and her fears, and the two young creatures spent ecstatic days together. Fritz described them as their honeymoon. Paul had honourably handed over a share of his wages,—indeed, Lenchen had asked him for it at the very outset. Fritz felt uncomfortable about this, but as his little friend insisted, he gave way and went with her to cinemas and dances: and sometimes for a trip into the country.

Paul suspected what was going on. Although he said nothing, it was not because he felt any obligation to the pair. Not in the least: it was simply that, since those hours by the lake, he had begun to think it ridiculous and unnecessary to interfere in such matters. Every one must look at the question in his own way. Besides, he knew nothing definite: and in spite of all Fritz's crude and careless ways, he was certainly a very decent sort of fellow.

The mother knew nothing. She was very delighted that the girl was so cheerful, and began to eat well and fill out.

When Paul had achieved his purpose, he wanted to see his lady without the loss of a single day. For four long weeks had he mastered his desire, and sat steadfastly upon

the dye-merchant's booth. His hair was already grey from constant shampooing. He told Fritz and Lenchen that he had now earned enough and was going to give notice to his master.

They would not believe their ears, and raised such a storm of objections that Paul agreed to stay another month. It was Lenchen once more who persuaded him by pointing out that he would now need a great deal of money to be able to take his adored one to cafés and dances. "What's the good of your smart suit," said she, "if you have not got a penny in your pocket?"

On the next Sunday afternoon Paul went to a public telephone and called up the number which he had repeated to himself so many times every day. His hand trembled and sweated as he held the receiver. He composed himself with an effort and spoke distinctly. A male voice answered: "Doctor Wallner here." The words were like a blow, but Paul had reckoned with this possibility and said, as he had made up his mind to do: "May I speak to Frau Wallner?"

"Yes, who shall I say?" came the curt reply.

Paul lost his presence of mind, muttered something unintelligible, and rang off.

With troubled heart Paul wandered about

the streets which looked depressingly grey and empty under a rainy sky. If only he had given some name or other! But then she would not have known who it was. What an abominable business! And perhaps the doctor had become suspicious and was tormenting her with questions. Then it was all up.

At last he went home. Fritz and Lenchen reminded him of his promise to take them to the fair: it would soon be shut and too late. Paul shook his head; Lenchen shrieked and stamped in her fury, but Paul went to bed.

In the dinner interval on Monday he rang up from the box at the eating-house; this time the maid answered. No, Frau Wallner had gone out. Could she give her a message? "No, thank you," answered Paul. Despondently he took his seat on the barrow. Perhaps he would never be able to speak to her. And he did not know where she lived. There were several Doctor Wallners in the Directory, and it might be any of them. . . . Then he suddenly remembered that he could get the address from the Central Exchange. But before he did so, Paul decided to ring up a third time. But he was so tortured by uncertainty that on the Tuesday morning he got off his seat under the pretence of feeling ill, and disregarding his master's

protests, rushed into the eating-house once more.

This time the lady herself came to the telephone. He was near to choking with excitement, and blurted out: "Good morning, this is Paul Schwarzer."

"Yes, but who are you?"

The boy was so dumbfounded by the question that his voice failed him: then he said thickly:

"You know,—I swam with you at the Tivoli."

"Oh, of course, yes. . . . Did you ring up yesterday and the day before?"

"Yes, I . . ."

"Then please don't do it again. Where do you live?"

With an expressionless voice Paul gave her the street and the number.

"Right, I daresay you'll get a letter from me one of these days. Good-bye."

Paul was incapable of replying. He wandered through the streets, quite benumbed with misery. He must get as far away from his barrow as he could. Never again would he sit beside the fraudulent vendor of hair-dye. That, at any rate, was over.

A girl recognized Paolino Nigrinus, spoke to him enticingly and stroked his arm. Paul snatched it away and hurried on.

It was evening before he got home. He looked wretched and weary, but, to all appearances, composed.

The dye-merchant had called in the meantime and made a dreadful scene. No one he said would listen to him now, or if they did, they jeered and made offensive remarks. He would sue Paolino for damages. Suddenly he broke down and began to wring his hands. "He's ruining me!" he wailed. "He can't leave me like this. Oh, please, miss, do what you can! I don't want to get him into trouble."

Lenchen ran to Fritz in a high state of excitement. If Paul did not like his seat on the barrow any more, it was all up with the love-nest and the honeymoon! And for the first time Fritz saw tears in Lenchen's eyes.

"I don't know what's happened about the lady," said she: "and he hasn't kept his promise about taking us to the fair. He's been walking about for days looking like a death's head and making faces to himself. And now the brute spends all day on his bed. That's all we get for our kindness."

Fritz did not appear so enraged as Lenchen had expected. Perhaps he was tired of his little friend already? She was still very young and immature. Perhaps he had come across something more attractive,—who

knows? At any rate, Lenchen had good reason for diverting her fury to Fritz. She shook him and wept despairingly. But she made very little impression on her friend. He told her not to make such a disgraceful scene. He would have nothing more to do, he decided, with a girl of this sort.

Paul refused any explanation: he said it was his own affair.

Lenchen said it was her affair too, and her friend's affair; but unfortunately the friend agreed with Paul.

"I suppose the lady's given you the push, eh?" screamed Lenchen, whose anger gave her a flash of insight, and meaning to hurt Paul if she could.

Paul kept himself so firmly in hand that the other two did not notice that the question had wounded him. He got out of the difficulty by means of a lie which he had concocted during the day. Almost every day a man had come up to the barrow and slipped a little note into his hand: on the note was written: "Take care: you have been found out." That morning he had seen the man approaching, and had been so overcome with terror that he had run away on the spot.

"Oh," said his sister: "and have you got any of those notes?"

But Paul was ready for this: he showed

the pair some notes that he himself had written while sitting on a bench in the park. "Yes, that's a bad business," said Fritz: and Lenchen was almost at a loss, but she would not give up the struggle yet. And suddenly—Fritz was almost at the door—she screamed out: "I know what!"

"Well, what then?" asked Paul, with a positive loathing for his sister's ingenuity.

"You've had a lot of notes from girls asking you to meet them, and from men too, as you've often told us. When this fellow comes again, you jump up and wave one of those notes at him, and shout: 'Get out, you dirty beast, or I'll have you arrested.' Then he'll have to prove that the note isn't from him! . . ."

"Nonsense! What about the handwriting?" said Fritz, dismissing the idea. "Well, I must be off."

So saying, he was through the door before Lenchen could say a word. For an instant she was rather hurt at being abandoned by her friend, but in her sharp, shallow little mind she really believed that Fritz had to get home as quickly as he could.

Then she attacked her brother with the merchant's threat to sue him. But Paul merely waved the piece of paper with its sinister warning.

The merchant was so terrified by these threats which Paul showed him next day, that he released Paolo Nigrinus from his engagement without further objection, and forthwith removed himself and his barrow to another part of the city.

IX

When Paul fled from his stool on the previous day he resolved that he would have nothing more to do with the hair-dye swindle: he had only lent himself to it for his lady's sake. As regards the lady herself, he would do his utmost to get speech with her. The uncertainty was intolerable.

He discovered her address from the Central Exchange. He put on his new suit and made his way one morning to the older and more aristocratic quarter of the city, feeling calmer and more composed.

The maid left him waiting at the front door. She said she would go and see whether her mistress was at home. Paul thought this odd, and could not help smiling. Then he heard a whisper behind the door through which the maid had disappeared. After a while she returned and said mechanically, without looking at the visitor, that she was sorry her mistress was not at home, and would he leave a message?

Paul said, No, and went.

His fury at the humiliation turned to hatred and contempt. She had a bad conscience, he thought: she was afraid of him. But she could not realize that he would take her harmless play so seriously. . . . Little ruffian, was he? Oh, he saw it all now. A woman like that just tempted a boy to amuse herself. He ought to be glad that a fine lady took any notice of him!

He was overcome with shame at the thought of how he had forgotten himself on the island. Very well, it would be a lesson to him. He was what he was, and he would not pretend to be otherwise. But the Frau Doctor, and people like her, must understand that we are men too, and have our pride—we can't be treated like cattle or playthings.

Paul did not shrink; the affair should finish. Everything that reminded him of the lady was a torment; and his fine clothes most of all. Well, that was simple—he would wear them no more. And the money he had saved he would spend, as he had promised, with Fritz and Lenchen at the fair: what was left over he would give to his mother.

He had once read in a book how a bold explorer set fire to the ships in which he had crossed an unknown ocean. His soldiers must realize that they had to fight until they won the victory, or were destroyed. He, too,

needed no help upon his way: his own strength, and that alone, should help him forward. He would fight, and he would win, knowing who he was, and what he could become. This humiliation should not thrust him back into the horde of idlers and parasites. Such were the people who brought discredit on the proletariat and were its greatest enemies.

He said as much to Hans and Wilhelm that very day. He was sorry to have left his two companions in a mood of false superiority. He belonged to them and not to any doctor's wife. But they really must give up their pilfering and dishonesty. That, he said, was what justified their "superiors" in despising them as a pack of scoundrels fit for nothing but the filthiest drudgery. This gave rise to a heated argument, as a result of which the two friends went for Paul with beer bottles. But Paul felt a sensation of glorious relief to be able to unburden himself of the anger and oppression of the morning and let out at the two of them with the greatest satisfaction.

To the lady he wrote the following letter:

DEAR FRAU DOCTOR,—

You sent me away this morning although you were at home. So you did not care to be reminded of our experience at the "Tivoli"

or to hear any more about me. I wanted to say to you that although I am out of work I have my accursed pride and could not have become your lap-dog. You would not have dared to shut the door in the face of a young man of your own class after you had seduced him. So I shall think no more of what happened between us, and I shall behave as if it had not been. Otherwise I shall never rid myself of the shame of it. You need have no fear of me, I shall be silent now and always. I should indeed be grateful to you for showing me where and to whom I belonged.

YOUR LITTLE RUFFIAN.

He posted this letter so that it should arrive by the second delivery and not be seen by Doctor Wallner.

Two days later he received a pink and highly perfumed envelope. Paul's first impulse was to tear it up unopened. But he decided to read it; he wanted to know what the Frau Doctor had to say to him.

DEAR HERR SCHWARZER,—

Your letter hurt me very much and I intended to leave it unanswered. But then I put myself in your place, and I felt I ought to reply to it. My dear boy, you are still

very young, and you really are a little ruffian, or you would not have written so impertinent a letter to a lady with whom you had spent such an hour as we did. There would not be much sense in my trying to explain to you what I mean by that. Let me only say this: in matters of love it is absurd to stand on your dignity and claim your rights. Such experiences cannot be judged and calculated like a matter of business. One gives as much, and as long, as one can, and one does not bargain. . . . But because I liked you and you gave me pleasure, I will give you this bit of advice: Take what is given to you, and give yourself as you may feel inclined. Don't think too much about the experiences of love. We don't think about the scent of a flower or a beautiful piece of music when it is over. You seem to take things too hard. You should not. Grasp life cheerfully and confidently at the point that comes nearest you: it is better to make a mistake or two than to miss what is going on by being too cautious!

I wish you luck.

ROSA WALLNER.

Paul shook his head as he read this letter for the second time, and then, with a smile more of pity than contempt, he tore it up. For a moment he felt not a little touched by

the lady's obvious kindly feeling, but after a moment's reflection her attitude struck him as painful and unpleasant. This, he thought, is the mentality of people who enjoy themselves and have no conscience. But people like us must live as fate decrees. No, Frau Doctor, we shall never understand each other.

In the evening Paul said to Lenchen that he wanted her and Fritz to come with him to the circus on Sunday.

At first his sister seemed not to have heard: she bit her lips and was silent, as she had been all day. When Paul repeated his invitation, she suddenly flew into a temper and said: "You might have asked us before: now you can go alone."

Lenchen was sitting at the kitchen table, scratching the scrubbed wood with restless fingers. Paul sat down beside her, and said: "Have you two quarrelled?"

She shrugged her shoulders: but her mouth was quivering and tears came into her eyes. Paul did not press her, he put on his coat and went out to look for work. That day he was lucky: a large store wanted sandwich-men. He reported at the appointed place and was supplied with a check cloak, tall hat covered with Scotch plaid, and two boards to carry in front and behind, inscribed with "Autumn Bargains!" and the name of the

firm. Thus garbed, a little procession of ten men marched solemnly through the streets, upon which the chill and gloom of late Autumn had already fallen. Their slow gait made them tired; and they soon began to feel stiff and hungry. The pay was poor: still two marks forty per diem was always something. They soon got used to the jeers of the street urchins and the stares of the passers-by. In the course of these monotonous wanderings Paul thought a great deal about his experience with the lady; and he could not conceive how he could have thought of her, while he sat on the barrow of hair-dye, as a possible sweetheart. Once she passed him in a closed taxi: she was sitting beside a large gentleman with a forbidding expression. The taxi had to stop at a cross-roads and, at the same moment, the little procession passed by. The boy's pulses throbbed with rage, but he could not help glancing in at the window. The lady recognized him in an instant. She turned her head and began a hasty conversation with her neighbour. Paul was glad she would not look at him, but he was wounded to the depths of his being.

Lenchen had finally consented to go alone to the circus with her brother. After all, she could not sit for ever sulking in the kitchen, and moan over the faithlessness of men. She

would forget all about it and not take love so seriously next time.

"Need you be, need you be, as much in love as that? . . ." It was the popular song of the day and there was a great deal of sense in it. The merry-go-round with its white gondolas and little horses went round unceasingly grinding out this melody: the glass fringes on the red velvet curtains tinkled merrily: and the rich-lipped, lovely ladies painted on the canvas back-scenes smiled out sweetly over their rococo bosoms. The swings were full of shrieking girls, with tumbled hair and flying skirts—a display that was greeted with wild whistles by their cavaliers.

"Oh, well," said Lenchen, "the jolly old world is going round still, but we're going round a bit quicker in our little gondola, aren't we, Paul?"

Behind the din and movement towered up the grey lime-washed walls of the tenements, and dark rain clouds hung gloomily over the glaring whirl of colour.

Lenchen grew quite dizzy and held closer to her brother's arm. Then they wandered contentedly from booth to booth, eager for amusement and excitement like the rest of that moving multitude in their dark workaday clothes and tilted caps. Sometimes a jovial

workman would pinch a girl, and others shouted caustic comments on the showmen's hoarse announcements.

"Walk up and see the human wolf Romelo!" shouted a man in a long white coat from a platform in front of which the pair were now standing. "He had a wolf for a father and a human mother!"

The miserable abortion, held by a boy on the end of a string, stamped monotonously on the wooden flooring under the lilac awning, and bleated feebly.

"You silly fat-head," shouted one of the crowd to the showman. "Can't you tell a wolf from a goat? . . . And as for you, your father might have been a kangaroo or an orang-outang!"

Paul and Lenchen came to the conclusion that the human wolf was a fraud.

They liked the beauty-show much better, where two naked females presented "living pictures after the Great Masters." One was called "The Echo," another "A Crime of Passion," and a third "Innocence on the Potsdam Platz."

"All quite respectable, you see," said the show-woman, as she drew back the curtain and displayed two large females whose exotic beauty recalled the figures in a perfumer's window, wearing scraps of torn lace round

their hips and over their bosoms, and a gigantic orange ostrich feather in their hair.

Paul was disgusted by the sight of the fleshy, bulbous contours under their thin covering of tinsel, and he laughed. Against his will he was reminded of his lady, whose legs, he remembered, had been just as unpleasantly solid. This was a painful memory and he dispelled it by calling up the image of Lenchen's charming body. It was so lovely —so supple and slim. And her brother unconsciously squeezed the little hand that lay within his own.

Then they went to the Boxing-Hall in which men with prodigious bellies and great sinewy arms fought, or wrestled, breathing heavily. They had short bristly hair or shaven heads, and their foreheads and nostrils were like those of beasts. Their weight made them sway as they walked, like elephants. They began by standing with folded arms, in stiff triumphant attitudes, on the platform outside which the impresario, who looked a good twenty stone himself, with a grin on his face stung them to fury by dexterous praise and blame, for all the world like a cattle-dealer prodding the beasts in their sensitive parts. He played off one against another. The winners at the last performance were heroes and champions and the losers were feeble,

cowardly monkeys. All this aroused a tumult of abuse among the mighty men, and let loose a positive hail of challenges—and the public stormed the box-office. At first they fought according to the rules, but the manager's sneers and the shouts of the audience gradually drove them to fury and they fell on each other with reckless brutality.

Paul and Lenchen meant to go away after every performance, but every time they paid the twenty pfennigs for the next fight. These hulking, brawny creatures seemed to wallow in the lust of battle, and brother and sister found it strangely exciting. The air in the packed wooden hall was choking with the stench of tobacco, sweat, and the moist reek of sexuality. Döhring, the boxer—the Champion of Silesia as the impresario called him—watched Paul as he paid his money, and looked him up and down as he might have done a calf.

"Why, you're made for a light-weight," he said at last hoarsely. "Ever think of it?"

Paul said, No, and smiled contemptuously.

"You make a nice bit of money at the game, my lad! And think of the glory, eh? We're a man short in our lot, we want a partner for Lehmann."

Paul stared at the red-haired, broken-nosed giant, who must certainly have been a butcher's

apprentice at one time. When he grinned triumphantly his face looked as though it had been split in two. The Champion of Silesia moved off: and Lenchen nudged her brother as she saw Döhring talking to the manager and pointing at Paul.

In a sudden access of nerves Paul elbowed his way through the crowd of spectators, and got outside before the man could catch him. Lenchen followed her brother reluctantly: she liked the Boxing Hall.

Meantime it had grown dark outside. The Square was festooned with red and green lights, and the merry-go-round glowed with dark crimson and deep gold. "Come along," said Paul to the pouting Lenchen; and they sat side by side on two proud steeds and sped round and round to the tune of "Need you be, need you be, as much in love as that; can't you be, can't you be, happy for a night?" Lenchen, in a rapture, flung her hair back and flashed a melting glance at Paul, as all the other girls did to their boy-friends. Paul, delighted at having escaped the grinning manager, and carried away by the excitements of the evening, leaned over sideways and kissed his sister wildly on her hair. Lenchen knew that the proper response was to burst out into a giggle and smack her brother's face: and she did so.

Then, gazing into each other's eyes, they were whirled up to the stars in a swing-boat: still dizzy, they ate a few Vienna sausages in the beer-tent, and left the fair arm-in-arm.

As they went off, they looked less like brother and sister than a pair of lovers. The city enveloped them in a mantle of smoke-grey and soft crimson, and in the muffled roar of its multitudinous movement. Two emotions drew that boy and girl together: their desertion by their lovers with their senses hardly yet awakened, and the tumult of the fair that still eddied in their blood.

They said nothing: they squeezed each other's hands and their eyes clouded. From time to time they turned to each other and smiled, but no longer now like brother and sister,—it was a smile of secret resolution. Paul thought no more about his lady, as he felt his sister's body moving beside him; nor did Lenchen think of Fritz. The kinship of blood did but make the desire that began to master them seem all the sweeter.

The mother was at home, asleep on her mattress, huddled in Father's overcoat. Erna was not yet there.

Brother and sister tiptoed to their places and undressed; for an instant they stood motionless and faced each other, tense with that unspoken thought. Each could hear the

other's quick, short breathing, and the hammering of their hearts was almost more than they could bear.

The girl's body stood up like a slender flower against the darkness: and her little breasts quivered on the lovely stem like bursting buds, soon to be broken by the fury of desire.

The brother trembled and bent towards her, his body felt like an empty husk. But his feet were as though paralysed by some mysterious fear. He had heard said that it was wicked to love one's sister. He did not know why, and he despised his cowardly hesitation. He must remember the lady's letter, and he began to realize that what she said was true.

"We used always to sleep with each other once," whispered Lenchen.

"I know."

"But we were children then."

"Yes."

"I wish I could sleep with you again, Paul, it would be so lovely."

"Lenchen!" Paul suddenly seized the girl and pulled her up to his mouth. Their bodies and their lips were so fused together that it seemed but a single form that hovered there in the dim room.

Later in the night the mother was awakened

by a noise. She sat up and peered into the darkness, but she could distinguish nothing. She felt for Paul's bed,—his blanket was still folded up. . . . But surely she could hear the children breathing . . . and it did not sound as though they were sleeping. Again she heard a noise,—this time unmistakable: Lenchen's soft whispers and the sound of kisses.

The mother sank gently back. Her staring eyes filled with tears. "It is our fault, Father!" she said to herself, her mind turned helplessly to the dead man. "We ought not to have let the children grow up in one room. They have begun to look for love,—and it is too late now. But Erna must not know, or we shall none of us have any peace."

The mother coughed as she often did when asleep, and then coughed louder, as there was a sudden silence the other side of the room. Then Paul whispered: "Sleep well, little one," and crept across to his bed, wrapped his blanket round him and was soon asleep.

The widow was tired and tried to compose herself to sleep, but she could only fall into an uneasy doze.

When Erna came in she started up once more. Her daughter noticed it.

"Why aren't you asleep, Mother?"

"I've been coughing so."

Erna undressed by her bed, sighing heavily more than once as she did so.

"What's the matter, Erna, dear?"

"Oh, nothing,—what should it be? Do go to sleep." Later on the mother heard her daughter crying into her pillow. She turned her head to Erna and said: "Has Klappert done anything to you?"

"Done! . . . He's noticed that the bell's rung, and he's turned me down. . . . Oh, these men—they're all the same. But I won't have the baby . . . you just wait and see!"

The mother said nothing. Motionless, with wakeful vacant eyes she lay on the floor under her dead husband's overcoat, as though she were guarding her children's destiny.

Next morning, when Paul went to the kitchen to wash, he noticed a troubled and imploring look in his mother's eyes. He bowed his head before that look which pierced his conscience-burdened heart. He made his way unsteadily back into the room where Lenchen still slept in blissful oblivion. How he hated her and all her prettiness, that looked so overblown in that pure morning light—her greedy, pouting lips, the bluish shadow on her eyelids that he had so lately kissed, the delicate rosebuds of her bared breasts, and her shining, tumbled hair. He hated her; he hated all her beauty, though he knew he

would yield to it again. He did not really love her at all,—not in any way. But he felt himself weakening as he looked at her.

His hatred turned to savage grief and misery. In that night those moist, pouting lips, that hair and those breasts, and that warm, quivering body had driven him to frenzy. But with every hour that brought that frenzy on him once again, the sense of guilt would weigh him down more deeply, his mother's imploring eyes would pierce him with an even sharper agony. Then he was seized with evil laughter. "I'll do as the Frau Doctor advised me, and she ought to know: I won't think, I'll just enjoy myself."

In this violent conflict of thought and feeling Paul spent the ensuing weeks, always struggling against the weakness that overmastered him in Lenchen's company. Sometimes he struck her in the torment of his hatred: and the next moment he had her in his arms and caressed her in the self-betrayal of desire. On other days he shut himself into a rigid silence that made even his sister afraid. More and more often he would rush from the house and tramp the streets until late at night.

Until,—for blood lived too near to blood,—the forces once awakened, but held in check, burst their bonds and swept him back to his

sister in a mood of heartless savagery that sometimes bordered on madness. Only complete exhaustion brought him peace and rest at last. Then the torturing struggle began once more.

"For others," thought Paul, "love is heaven," when in a torment of self-hatred after such hours of degradation he took his place in the little procession of ten sandwich-men. "But it has brought me down to hell, —though I suppose my feeling for Lenchen is not love at all. . . ." He remembered the children playing by the canal, and shook his head as he had done. . . . It was a good thing, he thought, that he could get out in the daytime and walk the streets with his sandwich-boards.

But the ten sandwich-men were dismissed by the firm in November. They were told they might come again in the New Year at the stocktaking. Lenchen was friendly and tried to think of something he could do. She was in love; her brother had merely fallen a victim to the narrow conditions of his life and the overheated desires of his age. And because Paul's sudden changes of mood made her feel uneasy, she showed an even more affectionate concern in his affairs.

Brother and sister thought of starting business as street-hawkers,—with cigarettes or

soap, perhaps. But capital was needed to lay in stock at the outset. They could now have made good use of those thirty marks which Paul had left over from the evening at the fair, and which Lenchen—before Paul had become subject to these paroxysms of fury—had carelessly wasted on her own vanities, a lace-edged chemise, and silk stockings. Paul suggested pawning his new clothes, but his sister persuaded him not to: he must keep those whatever happened, especially as selling things in the street in winter was an unpleasant business,—so cold and wet.

The pair sat side by side in the kitchen, completely at a loss, and caressing each other in an indifferent sort of way. Paul found his mind turning to the Boxing Hall and the "Champion of Silesia's" offer. But he felt such a horror of that athlete's brutality, that he said nothing aloud. Lenchen would certainly have been in raptures over the chance, and he would not have had a minute's peace.

Dispirited and hungry, they lay down on their mattresses. To-day the mother had come home without the enamelled saucepan. The Hasselbachs were saving up for Fräulein Lilly's dowry and living very close indeed. The sewing-woman was already very busy.

"What is the young man?" asked Lenchen.

"He's a musician," said the mother. "But

he's always in such spirits, you can't think. As soon as he comes into the house, he waltzes whistling with Fräulein Lilly through all the rooms, and he used to thump the old piano till Frau Hasselbach locked it up. I wanted to put in a word and say that young men might be allowed a little high spirits and that a musician without a piano was like a fish out of water. But Frau Hasselbach didn't half let out at me! She said this was no time for such goings-on, and she couldn't afford to have the piano tuned before the wedding. But Herr Zeisig—that's the musician's name—didn't let that worry him. Now he brings a concertina with him and plays it in the kitchen till Frau Hasselbach turns him out. To-day she sent him out to get in the washing."

"And did he?" Lenchen asked. "Well, I never!"

"Oh, well, musicians are good-natured sort of people—they'll do anything for you if they're allowed to make their own little row later on."

Paul and Lenchen could not sleep, they kept on worrying how the brother could earn some money. Suddenly Lenchen remembered the offer in the Boxing Hall. At first she was delighted, especially because Paul was so fine and strong, and boxers were her type. But as she thought it over she began to think of

Paul more as a lover than a brother. How if they hit him and hurt him badly? No, she could not bear it,—she felt sick at the very thought. She tried to fight against the temptation to remind Paul of the vacant post of light-weight. But suppose he did take the job? He would certainly be able to earn good money in the Boxing Hall. And Paul was good at keeping a whole skin: he hadn't taken much harm when he came to blows with Gellert. So she put the question to him.

Paul did not answer at once, then he said: "I've thought of that already; but they're such brutes and they knock each other about so horribly. Besides, I shouldn't earn anything at first—I should have to learn how to box."

"Yes, that's true enough," said his sister. "All the same I shouldn't wonder if you made a pretty good show against Lehmann."

These words so cheered and encouraged the boy, that he made up his mind to go round the following evening to the Boxing Hall and see about the job.

X

The merry-go-round and the swing-boats were already dismantled: the winter evening lowered frosty and dead above the stripped scaffolding.

"Yes, we haven't got a light-weight yet," said the Champion of Silesia, Herr Döhring, still dripping from a fight with his partner, François Braillard, magniloquently announced as French Champion of the World. "Come along and see Grello."

The fat manager prodded and thumped Paul over his whole body until the pain of it made the boy wince. "Aha, hurts you down there, doesn't it, my lad? You'll get used to it," observed Herr Grello, and a distorted grin spread over his broad face seamed by brutal lines. "Well, I'll give you a try: your chest and arms aren't half bad, and you've got a good reach. But lower down you're very weak; you'll need a lot of training before you're any good."

"When Lehmann's knocked him about a bit," said Döhring, "he'll put on muscle all right."

"Nonsense," said Grello, with an air of genial decision, "I won't have any talk of knocking about. Nothing of that kind here, please. My men have to keep in form for months and years. Look at Döhring here, Herr Schwarzer; he's been with me eight years, and he feels fine every evening when he's rubbed down. Why, he couldn't get up an appetite without it. . . . Right, it's a deal, then. I and Lehmann will train with you every morning for a month or so. I'll give you three marks a week pocket money: nobody's ever called Peter Grello mean. And after your first appearance we'll have another talk."

Paul overcame his feeling of revulsion. He would have liked to have walked out of the place. But here he was, and he must not be a coward. So he curtly said, Yes, to everything and merely asked what pay he could count on after his first appearance.

"Thirty marks to begin with, and in addition the prizes offered for any particular match: but half of those has to be paid back to the box-office after the show. Buenas seras, monsieur!"

So every morning at ten o'clock Paul went for his training at the Boxing Hall. Lenchen was very proud of her brother when she heard what he had done. "Paul darling, you're a

fine fellow," she said. . . . "I don't know how I shall live up to all this! . . . But the pay's rotten. You've let yourself be stung again. I shall go and give your Herr Grello a bit of my mind!"

Next morning she did so. She planted herself, with her nose in the air, in front of that formidable gentleman.

"Now then, you fat old screw," said she: "that's not the sort of pay to give my brother. You can't get away with that, I can tell you! He's a fine, strong fellow, our Paul is: so you'll please to hand over a bit more than that. You won't lose it: every one'll come along to see him."

Herr Grello merely shook his powerful head and whistled through his black stumps of teeth.

"Rubbish! you do what I say, you silly fat old man, or it's all off."

"Well, I've never been treated like this before!" And the great creature slapped his mighty paunch, which quivered with laughter. "And what was your idea, my gentle little darling, eh?"

"Fifty marks, to begin with."

At this, Grello fell into a positive pantomime of horror. Finally they both agreed on forty-five marks.

However, the manager had his good points.

When Lehmann sometimes in their practice began, half in jest, to hit Paul hard, the fat creature at once came between them, and indeed he wasn't above boxing the former's ears. Lehmann then turned nasty. "You mind out, Herr Grello, I'll thrash that little swine into a jelly for you one of these days. He'd fall down dead if you shook his hand hard enough!"

"Herr Schwarzer," roared Grello, in the tones of a sergeant-major, "don't you stand any nonsense. You hit him where you can; you have my full permission. And I'll give you five marks every time you knock him down." Paul did not realize that by these means Herr Grello was trying to make bad blood between the two future partners. He merely thought that his master liked him and meant to keep Lehmann in check.

But Grello was thinking that the public wanted to see something for its money: and if he didn't tickle up these young fighting-cocks of his, they would send the audience to sleep.

Every day after his training Paul felt so stiff and sore that he thought he would not be able to move the next morning. But he always pulled himself together, had a round with the practice ball, and let Lehmann "massage" him.

Scarcely four weeks had gone by when

Grello announced one morning that Paul was fit for the ring and said that he should fight three matches against Lehmann that evening. The manager stipulated that the rounds should all be indecisive, and with an air of earnestness warned Lehmann to spare his opponent's face and the lower parts of his body. "Fight fair, Lehmann: you're fifty pounds heavier and a much more experienced boxer. If you hurt Schwarzer, I'll fine you fifty marks."

Lehmann made a grimace that almost split his face in two. "If he hits me," he said, "I shall hit him back. If you let me have a go at the little swine, you must know what will happen. I'm not going to be made to look a fool."

Such was the prospect that evening when Paul stood for the first time in the ring. He felt an oppression at his chest, and his knees shook. With an effort he steadied himself, leaned back nonchalantly in his corner, and hung his gloved hands over the ropes.

The spectators looked him over with obvious satisfaction. The girls especially could hardly stop chattering. Döhring, who was in charge of the fight, introduced him as Schwarzer of Hamburg, winner of the silver medal for light-weights at the International Tournament at Vienna, 1927. Lehmann of Berlin, middle-weight, who had already won a gold

medal, was hardly noticed. The first fight was to last two rounds, Döhring continued, and each round was to last two minutes; then he gave the signal. Paul moved warily round his opponent, feinting as he did so, but forgot to cover his ribs: in an instant he found himself forced against the ropes and pitilessly manœuvred into a clinch.

"Mind your head, Schwarzer!" shouted the spectators.

"Come on, man," said Döhring scornfully. "You can go to sleep at home."

Paul hit out, but missed. Lehmann grinned: but Paul landed one in the hollow of his throat that made him stagger.

There were shouts all round the ring of "Go on, Schwarzer, give it him."

In such circumstances it was Lehmann's habit to glare in the direction of the shouts and shake his fist good-naturedly. Paul took advantage of this, hit his opponent squarely over the heart, and knocked him down. The audience roared delightedly, and Döhring counted. At the sound of "Five" Lehmann heaved himself up, and by "Seven" he was attacking Paul once more, this time in a blind fury. The next moment Schwarzer was on the floor, rolling about and gasping for air. A blow in the stomach. The fight would

have been over; but when Döhring had reached "Six" in the count, he announced the end of the first round.

At the start of the second round Paul was still a little dizzy. He pulled himself together, and, irritated by his pain, hit out wildly at his opponent. Again he brought Lehmann down, and again at the end of the round he himself lay on the boards looking at the point of death.

There was a roar of angry protest. It wasn't fair,—it was just butchery! Fifty pounds difference between them!

Herr Grello had to come forward and try to soothe the infuriated spectators by descanting on Schwarzer's skill and reach. The fat manager secretly regarded the trial with much satisfaction. The audience were roused and interested. Finally he sent every one away in a good temper by bestowing on Paul the ten marks bonus he had promised him for twice knocking down his opponent, and by asking for applause for Herr Schwarzer, which the latter acknowledged by feebly raising his fists.

Thus, evening after evening, Paul went through his three fights, and recovered himself in the intervals sitting on an old garden-seat in the ante-room. As time went on he learnt how best to use his skill against Lehmann's

brutal strength. This often gave rise to comical surprises which made Paul more and more popular with the public: indeed, they actively helped him by disconcerting his opponent by continual shouting. Lehmann always fell to this. But often enough Paul had to pay for this dodge, which roused his opponent to a blind fury, by a savage knock-out, and was dragged out, helpless or bleeding, to recover in those blessed intervals.

Lenchen came to see a fight once, but never again. She could not bear to see Lehmann butchering Paul, and her brother groaning on the ground.

But the next morning she went privately to Herr Grello and pleaded with the manager to see that Paul was not hurt: when he merely laughed at her, she threatened him with the police. Herr Grello then suddenly emerged from his obese repose, and demanded something that the girl was not prepared to give. She scratched his face, and bit his hand so savagely that Grello, panting with pain and wrath, had to let her go. Since that occurrence Paul fell out of favour with his master. Grello stirred up Lehmann against him behind his back, more and more often announced a fight "for which the usual rules could be suspended," and forgot to pay Paul the prizes he had promised. It was only with reluct-

ance that he agreed to increase his pay in January.

Paul was afraid that he could not carry on much longer. Lehmann had already hurt him twice with foul blows : and the days that he had lost, as the result of this, Grello had deducted from his wages. And the other boxers disliked him because he went home after the last performance, instead of going with them and their girls to the beer-cellar. "We aren't good enough for you, eh? A bit above yourself, aren't you? Lehmann will knock some sense into you one of these days."

Paul took everything with dogged endurance. He held on because his earnings were more important then ever to those at home. His mother had been bedridden for two weeks. She had walked home one night of icy rain while still perspiring from the steam of the scullery : as a result her cough had got much worse, and she finally went down with influenza.

XI

In these circumstances Christmas was very quiet. The children got hold of a meagre little Christmas tree, and hung it with " angel's hair " and silver apples : and they sat silently round Lenchen's bed, which had been requisitioned for the sick woman. The two old maids in the room below sang some carols in their falsetto voices : every word came through quite clearly.

Erna lay on her own mattress, stuffing herself with marzipan out of a paper bag, and cracking nuts. She was sullen and irritable, as she had been for weeks past. " It's beastly cold in this hole," said she : " and we haven't even got any coal for Christmas. If Paul could make such a nice large hole in the window-pane, he might have done something in the last two years to get a new one. But a lot he cares if we all freeze to death."

Paul then lost patience : until now his mother had always been able to pacify him.

" Erna, you really are a brute, you know : you're quite heartless. You earn more than

any of us, and you waste it all on your boy friends. I wonder they aren't too proud to let you pay for them. If you're so afraid of a draught you could have got a new window-pane long ago. Don't we see you filling your face with cold meat every evening? And look at you now, stuffing yourself with sweets and nuts. You haven't got a penny left for Mother. Why, you wouldn't even bring her medicine home because you'd have had to pay for it. Pah! I'm sick of the sight of you!"

"And who are you, I should like to know! A common boxer at a fair. I've heard from Herr Mulack at the office how they knock you about at the Boxing Hall: and you seem to like it too! You're a bit of dirt, that's what you are!" And she spat at the wall in contempt. Paul was about to jump up in a fury, but his mother held him back.

"No, no, Paul dear: every one's got their troubles to bear, and they're hard enough! . . . Must you go to-morrow?"

Her son nodded.

The mother closed her eyes, and her eyelids had a grey and leathery look. She seemed about to say something, but was silent, and gently stroked Paul's hands.

Lenchen, in the meantime, had smartened herself up. It was a holiday, after all. Paul had given her a lip-stick and a pair of stock-

ings. She had painted her lips purple, and shadows under her eyes. Paul thought she looked fascinating. Indeed, in the last few weeks his sister had become a real little lady. She had grown and filled out. And she had quite given up wearing the red slide.

She signed to her brother at the kitchen door, and said: "Don't quarrel with her on Christmas Eve! . . . And, I say, Paul, have you got any money?"

"Yes, about six marks."

"Well, couldn't we go and dance somewhere? It isn't much of a Christmas here, is it? We might have a little fun once in the year!"

Paul would have been glad enough to get out of Erna's sight for the rest of the day: but he did not want to leave his mother alone. Erna would hardly trouble to bring her a glass of water.

Lenchen clung to him coaxingly. Paul looked at her, and found the little painted creature very alluring: a feeling of excitement came over him and he longed to go out with her. . . . The raw carnality of the Boxing Hall had had its effect on him, and evening after evening there had roused the savage sensuality natural to his age: for some while now he had quite given way to his intrigue with Lenchen,—so he described it to himself,

—and had banished all his scruples and misgivings. "Whether it is love or not," thought he to himself, "we're in for it now: and I don't really mind what the Pope or any one else thinks about it."

Brother and sister read a passionate understanding in each other's eyes: and they told their mother they were going out to dance.

"What! On Christmas Eve? I never heard of such a thing!" put in Erna.

The widow nodded kindly: but her dim eyes were watchful.

"All right, but wait a minute, Paul dear: give me my purse out of my jacket. Ah, I thought so, here's a mark. Get two glasses of hot wine with it and drink my health: that will warm you up."

To please Lenchen, who was very sensitive on such matters, Paul put on his good suit and they went out.

When they had got downstairs, Erna said: "If Lenchen goes on like this, she'll soon be on the streets. How you can let them go out, and give them money too, I don't know: it's a crime, that's what it is. I've noticed for a long time that there was something between them. I don't care, but you should keep your eyes open."

The mother turned over painfully on her side: she was seized by a paroxysm of cough-

ing. Paul would have put his pillow under her and given her some of the soothing syrup. But now she had to wait until it had passed; then she said in a faint voice: "You've been amusing yourself for the whole year: you might let the children have a little pleasure."

Then the fever again seized and shook that worn body.

XII

The Englischer Hof was very gay that day. The girls were so smart,—they might all have come from the hunting-ground of the Alexander Platz. The Master of Ceremonies was in fancy dress and his jokes were strictly respectable. If any one did not dance properly round the room, or took any liberties, he tapped them with his rod. They waltzed to the tune of "Every year the Christchild comes" and Charlestoned to "Oh joyful, Oh blessed!" The only lights were on the two tall fir trees in the corners. The old grey walls with their decoration of painted rosettes, which had been silent witnesses of the revels of the great-great-grandfathers of that company, shone as youthfully as children's cheeks in the reflection of the candles.

Paul and Lenchen drank hot wine and danced with hardly a pause. One of the two bands on the platforms in the corners was always playing. The bandsmen wore evening dress, and little pointed hats and white beards.

Lenchen felt so safe in Paul's strong arms:

she laid her head against his chest, and he passionately kissed her hair. She seemed sweeter and more alluring than ever. He must put all harsh thoughts out of his mind—indeed, all such feelings seemed curiously dim. That was the effect of the wine and the dancing. All was a whirl of swaying, circling gaiety and murmurous laughter.

"Oh, Lenchen darling, you look like a little angel on a Christmas-tree. I've never enjoyed a dance like this, have you?"

"Oh, Paul darling, oh Paulickepaulacke, you're a lovely boy! What are you doing with your knees? . . ." And she began to hum the tune in ecstasy.

"You're the prettiest girl in the Englischer Hof, you are really!"

"Go home? I don't think! I don't want to dance on Erna's nut-shells!"

"What's old Rupprecht saying? 'This is the night of love'? That's what I like to hear! We won't go home for ages, will we?"

But the place closed at three o'clock and they had to set about going home. How they got down the wide creaking staircase and found their way through so many streets, they hardly knew when they thought of it the next morning. All Paul could remember was that he had climbed up a lamp-post and wanted to tickle the moon under the chin.

And he had thrown his cap neatly over a cat's head: the cat had bounded off with it and disappeared down some cellar steps, and they had to chase it. Paul lowered Lenchen by the heels into the cellar by the area window: the cat had slipped through a broken pane, but the cap was retrieved.

When they got home they felt their way upstairs, and carefully helped each other to undress. Paul stood grumbling in front of his bed and kept on murmuring: "I can't get into that bed,—it's the wrong way round." At last Lenchen pushed him back on to the mattress and lifted him into bed. The wine that they had drunk turned their joy into an agonizing bliss such as they had never known before.

XIII

Between Christmas and the New Year young Herr Hasselbach came to see the Schwarzers. He brought with him a bottle of sweet wine and some pastry.

"Here, Frau Schwarzer,—Mother's sent you this from the wedding. She hopes you'll soon be better and wants to know if you'll be able to come and do some washing soon. Mother doesn't know what to do: the washing hasn't been done for a month."

The widow was delighted with the young man's visit and his presents. She raised herself stiffly on to her elbow and asked Herr Hasselbach to sit down. Yes, she was already much better, and she would be able to come soon after the New Year. She had often wondered how his Frau Mama had got on, what with the wedding and all. Did it go off well? Fräulein Lilly must have looked sweet. She was sorry to have missed it.

The young man had first to get used to the stale air. He merely nodded. Yes, he said, it had all been first rate: they had kept it up

till the small hours. And Lilly and her husband were now at Schierke for the Winter Sports.

Lenchen surveyed the visitor from the kitchen door: she thought his thick, fleecy overcoat and his patent-leather shoes very grand, but she did not like his grey beady eyes, and entirely disapproved of his nose. It was much too broad, she thought,—a positive cucumber of a nose. Paul certainly was not a fine gentleman, but he looked a great deal nicer. He ought to have a grand overcoat like that, thought his sister. At present he had none at all. He had to go about in his father's old frieze jacket.

Paul had merely said a casual good day to the visitor as he came in, and went on reading his sporting paper. The dirt and disorder in the room made him feel unhappy. What on earth was so elegant a gentleman doing here?

"You're pretty crowded here," said Herr Hasselbach: "it can't be very healthy."

"But it's nice and warm in the winter," the widow answered; "four people keep the room very snug."

The visitor made a face. "Oh, well," he said: "every one to his own taste."

Paul glanced up for a moment and then turned once more to his paper.

"You look quite exhausted, Herr Hassel-

bach," said the widow. "Do you still have to work so hard?"

"Yes, I have to put in a good deal of work now just before the exams. But I've had a good time all the term, plenty of duels and beer: so I'm not complaining that it's come to an end now."

"Well, you've enjoyed your young days anyway," said the widow, struggling with her cough.

Herr Hasselbach leaned back in his chair. "Enjoyed is hardly the word," said he. "We students have to keep up the old traditions for the sake of the Fatherland. That's more than ever necessary now that we have no military service. You've become a boxer, haven't you?" he asked, turning to Paul.

Paul merely nodded and went on reading.

"That's an excellent thing, Herr Schwarzer. We can't have too much sport these days. If we aren't fit we shan't be ready when the time comes, which I hope will be soon. You mark my words!"

"It's all the same to us," answered Paul.

"Oh, don't say that, Herr Schwarzer. It's very important for a man to have ideals that he can live and die for. All this beastly Socialism and peace talk isn't an ideal at all. No decent man ought to touch it, I say."

"We've got our ideals, don't you worry,"

said Paul with a curt laugh, and turned to his paper again.

"Oh, stop it, Herr Doctor," broke in Lenchen. "Politics is all nonsense. We've known what it is to shiver and starve, we have, —yes, and still do. What they write in the papers is just talk. We're going to vote for any one who promises us more pay and more coal. We don't mind about his politics one little bit!"

"Hold your noise," shouted Paul to his sister. "Don't talk about things you don't understand."

"Well, it's damned cold here, anyhow," observed Herr Hasselbach, and got up abruptly. "There's an awful draught through that broken window. Don't you have any curtains at all? Why, any one can see into the room from up above, Frau Schwarzer."

"There isn't much to see, is there?"

"Well, I hope you'll get better quickly and come along soon. Send us a post-card before you do."

Whereupon he bowed stiffly to the widow (he was rather a short young man) and departed, taking no further notice of Paul and Lenchen.

"I wish you hadn't said anything," said Mother, as Lenchen came back into the room from the landing.

"That's all right, Mother," answered Paul. "That fine gentleman is welcome to his ideals, but he mustn't interfere with ours. If I knew as much as he did, and had as much money, I know what I would do,—you can be sure of that. I wouldn't waste my time in drinking and fighting duels."

"Every one has his place in the world and his duty, Paul, my dear," said his mother, lying back weakly on the pillow and gasping for breath. "And they've all got their troubles, high and low. You haven't done so badly, you know."

The boy felt a stab of pain from the bruises under his shoulder-blades, where Lehmann had hit them again the day before yesterday. The mother knew nothing about it, except that Erna's remark on Christmas Eve made her suspect that the lad was having a rough time just then. And that was why she had encouraged him to go to the Christmas Eve dance. In the meantime she had wept over her children's fate that she could not alter.

In earlier days she used, in trouble such as this, to pray to the God of her childhood. But her prayers had not been heard, she had been left to rely upon her own weakness. She did not complain, nor did she desert the faith of her childhood. Only she prayed no

more and transferred her pious hopes to the next world.

The children did not share their mother's faith. Erna and Lenchen laughed at it and Paul was silent when their mother gave utterance to this conviction. He did not hurt her feelings, and did not ask where justice, and Almighty God, were to be found. Rich people might have some reason to believe in Him and be grateful to Him. But the proletariat must somehow have got the wrong side of Him. As far as they were concerned, He was an evil God. Their mother had often said when Paul was still a boy that the Lord Jesus loved the poor and had suffered for them alone. He thought it very questionable whether rich people ever got to Heaven.

"They have got their own heaven upon earth," thought the boy: "but we have none at all. The worms eat us when we're dead!"

XIV

Erna had got a new friend, Emil Reuscher by name. He sat down one day at her table in the confectioner's where Erna usually went when she left her office. He peered into the girl's face and fell into such a state of excitement that he spilt his coffee, and kept rattling the spoon in his cup. When the band struck up "The Blue Danube," Erna gave him to understand by a look that he might stop rattling his spoon, and speak to her. And so it began. Emil soon realized the situation: and in his first disillusionment he decided to give her up. But the girl must have had some powerful hold over him, because he did nothing of the kind. Moreover, Emil Reuscher, who was a decorator by profession, was then out of a job, and much concerned as to how he was to provide for the more pressing needs of the moment.

Erna, for her part, liked her new friend; he was easy-going, and in her view had a pleasantly limited intelligence. Moreover, the fact that he was a widower was not without

importance. Widowers were, she thought, very amenable sort of people, and perfectly contented if they were well looked after.

When Emil told her that he could no longer pay the rent of the furnished room and confessed that he did not know what to do, his friend asked him to come to coffee with them the following Sunday. She promised to find a way out, and told him to bring his things with him.

On Sunday morning Erna said to her mother, who was scrubbing the kitchen floor: "Emil's coming this afternoon; Lenchen might buy some cakes."

Mother said that she had put by her last week's wages for the gas bill: but the daughter retorted that when the gas had been owing so long it would not be cut off that day or the day after. "We must have some cakes," she said. "We can't just give Emil a cup of coffee and nothing else. And our coffee's always such dishwater, too! . . . It's serious about Emil, you know: and I needn't tell you how important it is I should get a husband soon."

The widow went on scrubbing, breathing hard as she did so: then she said, "Very well; Lenchen, get some cakes,—and a half-pound of real coffee. . . . But what will Herr Reuscher say when the child comes?"

"He? Pah! He won't have to say anything. Besides, he knows already and he doesn't mind."

The mother stopped scrubbing, got up and brushed a few wisps of hair off her forehead. She shook her head hopelessly,—her face was grey and sunken with illness. She had just had an express post-card from Frau Hasselbach to say that she could not wait any longer: and in her anxiety over her job the widow had got up too soon. Her cough had grown more and more violent and she now had stabbing pains in the lungs. She could not get her strength as she used to do.

"Why are you staring at me like that and shaking your head?" cried her daughter irritably.

The mother had to sit down,—she felt quite faint from so much stooping.

"Yes, but, Erna dear," she said in a weak voice at last, "do you want him to live here? There really isn't room for another. There are four of us already, and soon there will be the baby. I can't see how we can manage. And you can't live as a married couple with Paul and Lenchen here."

"They can shift into the kitchen, and then we shall all be a happy family."

The widow's eyes darkened: she felt for Erna's hand. "Give me a drop of water."

Erna banged down the glass in front of her. "You're not looking up to much, Mother."

"No, Erna dear. Perhaps you won't have to wait very long. Then you'll be able to do as you like. If only Paul and Lenchen were provided for!"

"Oh, they'll get on all right together. Paul's earning money now, and they're as good as married already."

These words were like a blow in the face to the widow. In her agony for her children she felt such strength rise up within her, that seemed to lift her above the material body that still leaned back feebly in the chair. Her voice, usually so husky, now rang out strong and clear. "Erna, I will not have you say such a thing. Paul and Lenchen are my children as much as you; I won't have you abuse them. Just as I wouldn't let any one talk about your fatherless baby!"

So saying, the widow got up, dipped her rag in the bucket of water and went on with her cleaning. She must not give way to weariness and misery, she must work for her children. After a while she stopped and said: "People in such a bad way as we are must try to bear with one another."

Erna had never seen her mother so vehement. Her first impulse was to answer back

that she believed what her own eyes had seen the morning after the Christmas ball. . . . But then she reflected that she would have to be accommodating to get her own way.

"All right, Mother, I don't mean any harm. . . . Now what about Reuscher? He can't pay for his room any more. But we can't let him go to a shelter."

As her mother did not answer at once, she went on in a whining tone: "You must think of me too. If I don't marry soon, I shall lose my job. The boss is very strict in these things; he won't keep any one with the least thing against them. And Herr Mulack has been looking at me so strangely lately. I can't pay for a room and look after three people. Here we should at least save the rent."

"Erna dear, there really isn't room! Five people,—six people," said the mother half to herself.

Erna laid her head on her arm and cried.

Several minutes passed. Then the mother dropped her rag into the bucket and said: "Very well, Herr Reuscher can sleep here in the kitchen. I won't stand in the way of your happiness. I will borrow a mattress and bed-clothes from Frau Hasselbach, she's got some in the attic. . . . But as soon as you are married you must get a place of your

own. It wouldn't do with Paul and Lenchen here."

When Paul was told of this at dinner he was very angry. "Well, as if we hadn't to stand enough without a fellow like that about the place. I don't see why we should do anything to please Erna."

But the mother tried to calm him down and said it was the best thing they could do for the time being. Paul gave way, but reluctantly, and his hatred of Erna grew more bitter.

XV

In the afternoon he went to the Boxing Hall earlier than usual, and when the performance was over for the first time he did not go straight home but went with the other boxers to visit Herr Grello's sister, who kept a beer-cellar on the Invaliden-strasse.

It was very gay at first. An elderly woman, who looked like a half-starved music-teacher, ground out the latest tunes without a pause. She wore a black silk dress with a high stand-up collar, a skirt down to her ankles, and thumped so vigorously on the keys that her nickel-rimmed pince-nez kept on tumbling off her nose. The girls and their men, mostly street-women with their various companions, sat huddled in beery bliss at the round table, yelled the choruses, and droned out the melodies with richly sentimental unction. When the black-clad lady dropped her pince-nez, they all hammered with their mugs on the wooden table, and roared with delight. Tangled festoons of almond blossom and vine leaves hung from the ceiling, and the air was

thick and damp with tobacco smoke and humanity.

The athletes had their own long table at which the great creatures sat with their women, who were always in a state of violent excitement. Although Grello's men attacked each other savagely in the Ring, they were uproariously friendly over their cups, for all the world like a company of good-natured performing bears. Each in turn stood rounds of drinks with his winnings in the evening's fights, and for the first time they all showed themselves amiable to Paul.

He was sitting beside Trudi, Braillard's girl,—Braillard was the boxer who was billed at the Boxing Hall as Champion of France. His name was, in fact, Franz Bolle; he was born in Berlin-Britz, and a member of a league which admitted no one unless he had spent at least a year in gaol.

Paul already knew Trudi from the Boxing Hall. She sat evening after evening, a silent slim figure, in the front row, and never took her eyes off him, though she applauded Braillard alone, with a sort of mechanical air. He had lately told her that he was sick of her. She made too much fuss, and besides she was always tired from her work. She wasn't his type, anyway: he was soon through with slim and fair girls.

"I'm only too glad," said Trudi softly to Paul, "that he's after Lissy now. She ought to be dark and fat enough for him. I've been trying to get away from him for a long time. You can't imagine what a beast he's been to me." She was silent for a moment and let her head fall wearily on his shoulder. Then she went on in an even lower voice: "But the little I earn in the factory doesn't go far with six at home and only two of them earning. So I was glad to get Bolle, and he gave me money now and again. He isn't mean,—I will say that for him."

Trudi had long attracted Paul, ever since he had caught her eye in the Boxing Hall. There was such a look of sadness and appeal in her expression, like that of a child. And how slim and graceful she was,—she moved like a deer. Hitherto Paul had kept away from her,—he was afraid of Bolle's brutal jealousy; but now he said: "Just you tell me if he ill-treats you again. I'll let him know about it!"

The effect of the alcohol he had drunk made him bolder than ever under Bolle's eyes, in spite of Trudi's looks of appeal and warning. She knew Franz Bolle too well, and she knew what was likely to happen when that set glare came into his half-shut eyes.

They all noticed how Trudi was carrying on

with Paul: and the brawny giants amused themselves with letting fall remarks intended to irritate Braillard. He alone was silent, and pinched his Lissy from time to time so hard that she screamed and slapped his face.

Paul did not notice all this: he had eyes only for Trudi, whom he thought a kind fate had sent to him to put an end for ever to the torment of his life with Lenchen. In a sudden surge of thankfulness he pulled the girl to him and kissed her. Trudi resisted, for she was afraid of Bolle.

But Paul only felt the fragrance of her body and gazed at her parted lips: and then he kissed her wildly on the shoulder and the neck.

"No, no!" whispered Trudi; "not here," and tried to free herself. "They're all laughing at us!"

Paul jumped so violently that he upset the bench behind him with a crash. "Who's laughing at us?" And he stared about him with a challenging air.

Trudi pulled at his coat, and Döhring, who was always more his friend than any of them, whispered behind his hand: "Sit down, for God's sake, and be quiet!"

The others roared with laughter and looked at Bolle, who appeared quite unconcerned and devoted himself to his new fat friend.

"I want to know who's laughing at us,"

said Paul truculently: "I challenge him to fight, whoever it is,—and to a finish!" His face was dark with anger and he shook his fist.

"Bravo, my boy!" yelled Grello. "That's the stuff! It's all good for business, eh? I'll see that Schwarzer gets something extra for this."

Nobody listened to what he said: Bolle had got up slowly from his seat, like a great snarling cat. He walked quickly round the table, stopped in front of Paul, threw back his head, and with a lowering look at him said: "I'm laughing at your cheek, you little rat. Who told you you could kiss my girl, eh? How long has she been your girl, eh?"

"Since you've been sitting beside Lissy," retorted Paul, not in the least abashed.

"We'll soon see about that," said Bolle contemptuously, pulled Trudi out of her seat and flung her behind him, still grasping her with one hand. Grello's sister signed to the black-clad lady to stop playing. The company gathered round the three of them. No one dared to come between the antagonists,—not even Grello. An affair of this kind must be disposed of without interference.

"Now then, my lad, you can either pay for the girl properly, or I'll smash your face for you." So saying, Bolle gave Paul a playful punch in the chest. Paul replied in similar

fashion: and they went on sparring for a while.

They then fell on each other savagely. Bolle was much the better boxer, but the drink Paul had taken doubled his strength and made him daring. Both were already bleeding and gasping for breath, and grunting out insults at each other as they did in the Boxing Hall. Finally Bolle was knocked out by a tremendous blow in the eye, and fell on the floor in agony. Paul was nearly finished: the other had kicked him so hard in the belly that he staggered half unconscious against the table.

The little company of boxers was delighted. That was some fight, they thought: but Braillard shouldn't have kicked.

"What do you know about my young fighting-cock, eh?" said Grello, full of exultation. "Got a bit of punch, hasn't he? Always on the spot. That's my training." The fat manager was bursting with such pride and self-satisfaction that he felt he ought to make a show of generosity. "Schwarzer," he announced, "I'll give you ten marks more for this month, and the usual prizes as well."

They all sat down again and went on drinking. Paul did not betray the pain he was in: he knew he would expose himself to lasting contempt, and lose his new hold on Trudi, if he did not sit out the rest of the evening.

Bolle, too, was in his place again. Lissy had bandaged the damaged eye with a damp cloth. He paid no more attention to her than he did to Paul and Trudi: he was choking with fury over his shameful defeat. However, he had lost the fight, and what was worse he had to stand for Grello's mockery. He cursed unintelligibly under his breath, and finally said aloud, though no one could understand him: "*Moi, François Braillard, je peux attendre qui rit le dernier.*"

Herr Grello treated the antagonists to plates of sausages and salad, and the elderly pianist went on with her repertoire. There was dancing: the girls in the usual provocative attitudes of their kind, while the men, straight and stiff, with their cheeks against the girls' shoulders, pushed them round the room.

Paul wanted to dance with Trudi, but he could not walk for pain, and had to sit down.

"Never mind, some other time, eh?" said the girl soothingly in her kind voice and stroked his hand.

Paul smiled into her eyes: they were blue, and the cool light in them passed into his fevered, eddying blood.

XVI

The journey home was torture. Trudi helped him along nobly, then she insisted on taking a taxi. After all, it was entirely on her account that Paul was in such pain. But Paul would not let her,—he said that taxis cost too much money after midnight.

Their slow, short steps tinkled like glass in the clear, frosty winter night. The stars looked ready to drop out of the steely vault of heaven.

"Do you like looking at them?"

Paul said "No."

"But why not?"

"Because they make one feel all lost: and there's so much already that is hard enough for us to understand. I daresay, when one has learnt a lot, and has the right to be idle for a bit, one has time to find a meaning in the stars and suchlike. But people like you and me have to be always on the look-out if we're not to go under."

"Ah, no, Paul,—it's so lovely to forget everything for a bit. When I come home in

the evening from work, so stupid and tired that I could fall down, or when I'm quite desperate because Bolle's been a beast to me, I love to look up at the sky. I don't think of the factory any more, or of Bolle,—all that seems as if it didn't exist."

Paul stopped and listened to her voice; it was like a stream of light and warmth pouring into his heart. Then he had a strange thought: perhaps she so loved to look at the stars because the light in her eyes was like starlight. Surely it was so: for he, with his dark eyes, loved the darkness.

"I like the darkness," he said aloud. "Everything looks so harsh in daylight; it is all just so and not otherwise, and you have to do something about it. But in the night the darkness covers everything, so that you can't recognize or distinguish things, and you can imagine they're quite different from what they are. For instance, when I get home to our kitchen I shall find just a dark, warm room. But to-morrow I shall see the chairs and the table with all the paint scrubbed off, and the bare boards of the floor. That makes me depressed and I can't forget it all day. . . . I often look out through the bare windows. Then I suddenly see the black angels behind the window-panes. They are enormous, and everything that is dark in us is

light in them—, I mean like eyes and hair. Light! they seem full of it, and we have to live in darkness. Their eyes are so dazzling, so piercing, that I have to turn away, and then I feel a sort of oppression and fear as though they were crushing in the walls, and the room, and me, with their huge black bodies! It's like a sort of vast force in the air that never really touches me. . . . Sometimes, in dreams, they seem quite kind and jolly. Then they change into the other boxers at the Ring charging down on me like the black angels did. They look so funny,—like what you see in a magnifying glass. Grello looks absurd, just as when he opens his mouth to take the count at a match. Like an old fat frog snapping at flies! Then Lenchen often comes along,—that's my younger sister, and pokes her forefinger down his throat. But suddenly her finger turns into a cigar, and Lenchen sits on the end of it like a little devil in Purgatory. That's because my sister is a Catholic, and my father always used to talk like that when Lenchen was naughty. Then Herr Grello turns into Satan, with a huge fork in his claw and nothing but snakes round his middle. That's how I've seen pictures of him. When I box with Lehmann in my dream and he gets me against the ropes and hurts me, Grello spits on his

fork and roasts him on his cigar. And so on. . . . What things one does dream!"

"I believe in dreams," said Trudi; "dreams are certainly intended to mean something. You'll see,"—and she laughed gaily; "Satan will certainly roast Lehmann one of these days. He's been such a swine to you."

"That's all right, I've learnt how to deal with him now. Were you there when Döhring counted him out the other day?"

Trudi shook her head. "No: but I love to see you box. It all looks so jolly and neat when you do it!"

She squeezed his hand. Then she stopped, came very close to him, leaned her head back and offered him her mouth with a rapturous smile. They kissed, and hung mouth to mouth until she freed herself and said, with a curiously childish intonation:

"Trudi's waited for you a very long time. But Paul never so much as looked at Trudi. No, I can't let you off!" And she slapped his cheek gently.

Paul humbly excused himself. "I always thought that Bolle would be a bad man to cross. Yes, I've been a proper little coward,—because you've attracted me for a long time. But I don't care for ten Bolles or anybody else now."

"There, then!" said Trudi soothingly, and

stroked his cheeks, his forehead, and his mouth. "I'm very glad you were careful of Bolle, and you're not to go to the Boxing Hall any more,—you must promise me that. You can't think how mean and vindictive Bolle is when he's got a grudge against any one. He's not afraid of anything. While he was still a sailor he murdered someone in a French seaport, and was put in prison: and later on in Hamburg he crippled a policeman for life. He did a long spell for that. He's just thinking now how he can do you an injury."

"Do me an injury?—much I care, Trudi, my dear! I'm so happy I could jump over the moon, I tell you!" He seized her, whisked her struggling in the air and held her there while she laughed and screamed and threatened, and pulled his hair, and then set her down again and caught her in his arms.

"Trudi, you're the friend I've been looking for. You only think of other people,—you'd like to pack me up in cotton wool and bring me a bottle every day. But it won't do, my dear. Of course I must go on boxing. Why, I shall have to earn twice and three times as much as I do now."

The girl opened her eyes so wide and looked at him so threateningly that he thought she was really angry: and, as she did so, she

forced him against a sand bin that happened to be open, and swore she would tumble him into the frozen sand and leave him there, if he did not promise what she asked.

Paul laughed and yielded, but he soon grew thoughtful and looked troubled. Supposing he could not stay with Grello because of that accursed kick, what would happen to them at home? Besides, Trudi would now have to rely on his help. . . . The girl suspected what was on his mind, for she became affectionate again, and said in her fresh, clear voice, as she shook his arm gently: "Don't let your hair go grey over it, Paul; we'll stick together and get through all right."

Clinging close to each other, they started the toilsome journey once more. The delay made the pain all the more acute, but Paul hardly felt it. The richness of his new experience had benumbed his senses. To the right and left, the dim lines of houses receded into the distance, silently concealing the million destinies of sleeping men behind their gloomy walls, and the snowy street swept upwards in the blue darkness towards the clear serenity of the starlit sky that Trudi loved so much. They forgot to-day and yesterday, their two hearts beat as one, and their breath commingled as it floated before them like a white cloud in the night.

Paul warmed the girl's freezing hands. He noticed for the first time how rough and hard they were.

"Why, what's the matter,—your hand's all cracked and torn?"

"Oh, that's only the factory."

Paul asked what she meant, and Trudi told him that she worked in an india-rubber factory. The tyre-tubes were passed from one worker to another on a moving belt: and you had to look out because the time for each tube had been exactly calculated. "I have to polish the end of each tube with a bit of sand-paper,—forty tubes in an hour. After the second hour my shoulder's quite stiff: and one's hand never stops bleeding from the sand-paper. But the worst of it is that one gets quite stupid and giddy with eight hours of it,—and there's mostly overtime too. And then the rules are so awful, the bleeding never stops, and I sometimes get quite paralysed for a bit. But you can't stop for an instant, only in the interval, and that's like a bit of heaven, I can tell you. The third time the belt stops by your fault, you get the sack. And they're always glad to have some excuse to reduce the staff: I've got two warnings against me already."

"And what time do you begin in the morning?" asked Paul.

" At eight now, seven in the summer."

" Well, then, you hurry along home, Trudi : you've only got four hours' sleep."

This started another conflict like that by the sand-bin : but this time Paul did not give way. But not for the same reason : he was furious that Trudi had to go through such torment every day. She must not see his indignation : it would not help her, it would only make her the more conscious of her bitter fate. And so it goes on, thought Paul broodingly, when they had at last parted after a lingering kiss.

" What is to become of us all, what can be the meaning of this shameful life ? We slave till we are stupid and crippled, and those above us pile up money and amuse themselves. Pah ! Where's mother's just God ? In a book, and nowhere else."

With these thoughts in his mind, but also with joyful recollections of Trudi, Paul reached home.

In the kitchen he nearly fell over Emil Reuscher, who was lying between two blankets on the floor.

" Curse the fellow," he said ; " I'd forgotten all about him. . . . That's odd, now : I got so furious over him yesterday, and went off with those blackguards so that I shouldn't have to see him . . . and now I'd better be

decent to him because I should not have met Trudi otherwise. Well, that's really funny." Paul bent down and tried to distinguish the sleeping man's features.

Reuscher must have been disturbed by his entrance; he suddenly sat up still half asleep and gasped out: "Lisbeth." Paul, himself startled, stepped back. "No, it's me, Paul Schwarzer.—Can you sleep like that? Isn't it hard?"

"Not a bit,—anyhow, I don't care. . . . But I really thought it was my Lisbeth. At the last, when things began to go badly with her, she often used to come suddenly to my bed. But I was glad when she came, for I used to be able to soothe her and cheer her up. And I often miss it all. Oh dear, one gets used to everything, you know."

Paul sat down beside Emil on a kitchen chair. His own exuberant sense of joy gave him a feeling of friendly sympathy towards this strange man who sat up wearily on the bare boards, leaning forward and whispering to himself, "Lisbeth."

"Strange!" thought Paul. "Here am I, with my heart so full, and there he is cowering in his solitude. And we are both of us men, and the same night is above us."

"Yes, one gets used to everything," repeated Emil, and nodded to himself. "I've quite got

used to the fact that my wife is no longer there. Do you know, Paul, that I couldn't bear it if she suddenly appeared again. She's been lying out there at Friedrichshain for more than two years now. There she is at peace after all her pain, and I must see how I can get through the rest of my life. I don't see how I'm to do it alone."

Strangely enough, Paul's thoughts turned to the black angels. One of them stood, invisible, in the kitchen; but his cool, deep breath filled it like the fragrance of flowers on a summer evening after a storm. Or was it but the breath of a human fate, of a strange man, who lay here on the floor between two blankets and was to marry Erna?

"It's too bad," thought Paul. "She'll give you hell." And he struggled against the temptation to warn Emil about his sister. He felt it to be his duty. What finally restrained him was simply the thought of his mother. She always meant well, and she had made no opposition to the union of these two people. It would not be right to speak to the stranger without her knowledge. But how could such a gentle, patient creature endure a girl like Erna? If only she meant to contribute a few savings and some furniture to the home. But all she had to offer was another man's child. It was incredible.

Perhaps Herr Emil Reuscher was a little weak in the head, as Erna had more than once maintained? . . .

"Well, now I suppose you're going to get used to my sister?" asked Paul.

Emil had lain down again upon the floor. Paul could only just make out his portentously broad forehead and his meagre moustache that jerked up and down as he talked.

"Yes," the man replied thoughtfully, "Erna is so gloriously alert and energetic, she always knows what she wants. I shall get quite self-confident myself when I have her around. I've quite enjoyed my solitude these two years, but one gets so frightfully tired and indifferent: and that's a bad thing. You see, I had scarcely buried my Elizabeth, when I lost my position in the decorating business. I was told it was because of a general reduction of staff, but I knew it was really my fault. I had suddenly lost my interest in the work and got slack. Why should I exert myself now, and for whom? Later on I found some temporary employment, but it did not help me very much. I was going steadily down-hill, simply because I made no effort to stop. At first I had to sell my furniture bit by bit, and then give up our nice two-roomed flat, and so it went on . . . but since I've known Erna, I feel quite convinced that I shall make

good again. And for that reason I'm glad about Erna's baby, because I shall have to work twice as hard. Besides, I'm very fond of children, perhaps because I never expected my Elizabeth to have any."

With these words Herr Reuscher dropped asleep again. Paul felt his way to his own bed. Suddenly Lenchen emerged into the faint light of the window, now a glimmering square against the darkness.

"Where have you been all this time?" he heard her whisper.

"At Grello's sister's beer-cellar," said Paul in a flat, curt tone. A feeling of hard revulsion came over him. There was no one but Trudi now. She would save him from this life of torment. He must stop all this business with Lenchen, once and for all. It was never love at all, nor anything like it. He knew it for certain now, since that evening. It had all happened because they were always crowded together like that.

"Aren't you coming?" whispered Lenchen in a small, tearful voice.

"No, I'm tired."

His sister threw herself back on her bed and quivered with weeping.

That softened Paul's heart. His guilty conscience confused his purpose. He fought with the temptation to go to Lenchen. . . .

She had been kind to him and now he must put her aside in the fullness of this new real happiness that had come to him. The more bitterly Lenchen wept, and Paul realized how he must make her suffer, the more he began to dread the future. One grinding thought made the cold sweat stand out upon his forehead: If anything happened to Lenchen, he would have to bear the whole responsibility,—before his mother and before the world. Once more he felt his mother's agonized accusing eyes burning into his back. It was, now, not any feeling of revulsion, nor any thought of Trudi,—it was this terror that paralysed him and would not let him go to her, and speak a word of comfort or of kindness.

XVII

Even in the days that followed, when Paul had to stay at home owing to the persistent pain of his injuries, he could not bring himself to say a single word to Lenchen. Both of them avoided looking at each other. In the daytime Paul felt cheerful, and his thoughts were full of Trudi. He wrote her letters which Emil took to the post, proclaiming his love in awkward, passionate words, and always ending by saying that he could not wait to see her until Sunday evening. He was full of silent gratitude to this good angel who had delivered him from his evil perplexity. But in the night came doubts and fears: the black angels,—terrible tormenting visions of fear,—rose up against him and he was helpless.

Paul knew his sister's violent, defiant temper. She would be capable of anything, once she knew the truth. For the time being, she, too, took refuge in sullen silence, asked no questions and said nothing, because she knew that her brother would put her off with evasions.

Every day she grew paler and thinner, until the mother began to be quite concerned.

When she asked what was the matter with Lenchen, Paul shrugged his shoulders. The widow gazed earnestly at her son, with a sort of listening look in her wide eyes. Then she said: "You know something, I'm sure, but you won't tell me. Well, it's between you and your own conscience. But it would be much better if you would try and say what it is. You know I want to help you all."

Paul muttered in reply with his chin buried in his jacket. "Don't you worry, Mother,—I'm not such a silly boy as I used to be."

The mother smiled a forgiving little smile, and busied herself at the sink.

Dark thoughts raced through Lenchen's brain, too, and then her mood would change. When she saw her brother bent over the table, lost in his own meditations, she was convinced that he had found some one else and was thinking about her. And, in deadly earnest, she swore she would shoot him, and his new girl too. Or perhaps she'd use poison, a bullet was far too good for them. But at other times she thought: "I know our Paul: he's been fighting in the beer-cellar and got the worst of it, or perhaps he's knocked Lehmann out again and thinks he's no end of a fellow, and glares at poor little me, just

because I'd dared to ask him where he'd been all night. He needn't throw his weight about; better boys than he have known how to behave decently to their girls," thought she, remembering the heroes of her magazine stories.

Paul was glad that Emil Reuscher was there: he found distraction in his company, though he could not help thinking him ridiculous. Indeed, the pair of them were continually quarrelling: Reuscher was dignified; Paul was impatient. What on earth, for instance, did the fellow mean by smearing all the kitchen walls with drawings? Reuscher maintained he could not help it, his artistic impulse was so strong that he dared not disobey it. Besides, these works of art were only carried out in charcoal, and could be easily washed off. "I must," he said, "record whatever catches my eye; but whether it annoys or amuses you I just don't care!"

The day before Emil had fetched a trestle-bed and a mattress from the Hasselbachs' on a hand-barrow. The widow had to pay for them with the money she had laid aside for three weeks' rent. ("We can't give away such things these days, Frau Schwarzer.") The widow had to agree. Especially as young Herr Hasselbach had not passed his examinations and was still costing money.

Scarcely had Emil, with much puffing and

blowing, put the mattress down in the kitchen, than he was at the wall again with his stick of charcoal. The trestle-bed was still lying on the barrow in the front entrance when the widow came back in the evening.

"Look at this, Paul," said Emil eagerly, while his right hand danced over the wall like an agitated fly: "here's the railway bridge, thrusting obliquely,—thus,—into the rows of houses behind it: the street looks very small against that tremendous sweep of the bridge, like a poor little cat slinking under it, at an angle of about thirty degrees. There's your cat, all four paws of it,—do you see what I mean?"

"See what you mean!" said Paul. "There's nothing to see! You might at least draw a train on the railway bridge."

"Wrong! No doubt you would, but an artist wouldn't! If you rightly understood the huge mass of the railway bridge and the viaduct dashing into the rows of houses, and in contrast with it, the shrinking little cat, you would see that up above people rush in an iron whirlwind from East to West, while we are little puppets toddling along from Moabit to Charlottenburg and back again. I might call the picture 'A Cat's Life!' You're always interested in Socialistic ideas,—here's a highly Socialistic picture for you!"

"Really, Emil, this is too much. I should like to know what your bridge and the cat underneath it has got to do with the proletariat and their needs. Nobody but you could find any sense in it at all. You don't know them, and you don't care a rap about them: you'd better become a Professor, that's your proper job. No, you can't impose on people like us with such nonsense: you don't belong to us any more, you're an absolute bourgeois already."

"Now, now, Paul,—don't lose your temper, please. I've suffered enough misery and injustice. But you don't begin to understand me."

"That's what I say, you don't belong to us any more. You live entirely in your own ideals and you want to climb out of your class. That's why you hope that Erna will keep you up to the mark. You told me that first night that was why you were marrying her and taking on the baby as well: so that you might have duties! Take any labourer or factory hand,—he doesn't need to marry to be told what to do and think! . . . No, Emil, you don't belong to us any more, or we couldn't help understanding each other."

"Well, don't you want to get out of all this?" asked Emil, much more astonished than indignant. "Or do you really think

that the proletariat are the only class in Society that want to remain exactly what they are to-day ? "

Paul was nonplussed by this question. And when at last he found an answer, he spoke with more irritation than ever :

" Now it's you who doesn't understand me, —or won't understand me. Of course we all try to become something more and better than we are to-day. But we shall still think and feel as proletarians and still be friends with our own kind. But you think and feel like a bourgeois when you make these ridiculous drawings that don't help anybody. The bourgeois have whole Museums full of that sort of thing. It has nothing to do with our feelings and aims."

Emil could not control a smile. Paul jumped up in a fury, but his pain forced him to sit down again.

" You've learnt your lesson very well," said Reuscher. " But do you seriously think that a proletarian who has got somewhere still thinks and behaves like one of his former class ? Not on your life. The changed circumstances change the whole man as well."

" Rubbish ! " said Paul vehemently : " when an aristocrat loses his money, he does not become a proletarian for a very long time, and if one of us goes up in the world, he doesn't

change his way of thinking for a long time either. Only lazy or ambitious people do that. We had a man in our locksmith's shop who was a very high and mighty sort of fellow. But he treated us apprentices much worse than the master, who was a solid, contented old bourgeois. . . . No, I once forgot where I belonged. . . . I got mixed up with a real lady. Since then I've been absolutely cured."

"Well, well,—every one has his own views on the point. I'm sure I entirely respect yours," said Reuscher, breaking off the dispute, and pursuing his labours on his picture.

He often drew Erna's thin, hard face from all sorts of points of view. And under the drawings he wrote: "My Future:" or "New Life:" or something of the sort. Erna felt quite flattered and encouraged him in his hobby, which she, but for other reasons than Paul's, regarded as quite futile and even childish. But she said nothing because Emil was a pattern of affection and docility, as long as he was allowed to draw on the walls without interference.

Lenchen made open fun of him.

"I wonder where you keep your eyes! Those aren't trees: the engine looks like a barrel-organ: and Erna's face is something to frighten the kids with."

Herr Reuscher bore all this acrimonious

criticism, and his companions' want of understanding, with a tolerant smile.

"I'm not a photographer," he said apologetically.

Only the widow liked his pictures.

"Herr Reuscher," she said, "you are an artist."

But he modestly declaimed the title. He only recorded, he said, what he had seen.

XVIII

Amid a succession of such disputes with Emil, time passed until the evening for which Paul had waited so impatiently suddenly arrived. His head was throbbing with anxiety as he left his bed in the morning. Would the pain have gone? No, it was still there in spite of the hot compresses with which he had secretly treated himself. He tried rubbing the place, and bending forward as he walked; but it was no use, he had to sit down again when he had gone ten paces. Paul set his teeth and tried once more, but the pain grew worse and worse, and at last he felt quite weak. He fought down his tears and asked Emil what he should do, for in spite of their differences, he looked on Emil as a friend. Reuscher was for fetching the doctor, as he had wanted to do for some days past. But to this Paul would not agree. This would mean giving up all idea of a meeting with Trudi, for the doctor would keep him in bed God knows how long. Emil, whom Paul had told about Trudi, allowed himself to be

over-persuaded. On his advice Paul lay down again and Reuscher made him another poultice. Perhaps he would feel better by the afternoon.

But he did not. Paul crouched in agony at the table in the darkening kitchen, and Emil sat silently by his side. Out of doors the rain pattered monotonously on the window-pane, and gurgled and splashed along the gutters. Lenchen was clattering about in the inner room behind the shut door. She had announced that she was going out for the evening, and was now smartening herself up. Paul wanted to ask where she was going, but his behaviour during the last week had made that impossible. His sister had observed, in a tone of biting contempt:

"I'm sick of sitting around here. Perhaps I shall pick up a nice new boy-friend!"

The lad was seized by a new and torturing fear. What if Trudi came here! He had begged her not to come to his home; if he did not turn up it would simply mean that his pain was no better, nothing more.

Emil began to talk of Trudi in low tones: and asked him about this and that, for he knew that this was the best way to help Paul through those wretched hours.

"Yes," said Paul, with a sudden smile. "She loves to look at the stars. What do you think about them, Emil?"

Emil was silent for a while, and then he said :

" I always wonder at the law in everything. I once read in a book,—I used to study a lot at one time,—that the planets up there move and revolve by the same laws that you can find in the composition of a crystal or a snow-flake. Isn't that wonderful, Paul ? And the same book said that the life of every man is an instance of the same law. Well, if you follow that out, it means that what we call our fate is ruled by the same laws as what goes on in the sky. You can hardly realize this because you seem so small ! . . . Do you know what I believe ? . . . I think that the noblest religion is this conviction of an impenetrable wisdom in all beings and things. This conviction means to me what others call God. Perhaps that is what drives me to draw everything I see. For this wisdom is to be seen in all things."

Paul silently marvelled at his friend's high thoughts, but he could not grasp this faith any more clearly than his mother's faith in earlier days. He was still entangled in the confusion of his everyday life, and so utterly convinced of the injustice, and the want of any true goodness in that being whom the clergymen, his mother, and now Emil, called God, that in his grief and disappointment he could not help being malicious.

"Well, Emil," he said, "I can only say that if every man's fate is appointed by a wise God, why does He allow a thousand people to roll in money and live in palaces so long as a hundred thousand people have not enough to eat and live in holes and cellars and tenements? Those are fine and noble words of yours, but they have nothing to do with us and how we live."

"Do you think, then, that the masters of the world are happier than we?"

"Well, of course I do. They can do all sorts of pleasant things that we can't. For instance, have you ever been out of Berlin?"

"Yes, I've been to see some relations in the country."

"Have you ever seen mountains or the sea?"

"No, never."

"Nor have I," said Paul, "and I don't think I ever shall. But that's not what I meant when I asked you about the stars. Do you think that the only people who look up at the stars are those who have a sort of starry look in their eyes? And are they specially good people?"

"That's a very strange idea of yours," said Emil. "I really don't know. . . ."

At that instant there was a loud ring at the street-door bell.

Paul jumped up and in his agitation shouted, for all to hear: "Trudi! O God! . . . and Emil mustn't know about Lenchen and me."

"I'll open the door," said Reuscher to Paul, who was standing there helpless.

"No, no, I'll go. Go into the other room and keep Lenchen there. . . ."

The bell rang again. The door of the inner room opened and Lenchen appeared.

"Why don't you go to the door?" she said sharply and ran out on to the landing without her frock on.

"Now I must keep steady or I'm done," Paul thought, and sat down again at the table.

Emil shook his head. "I don't understand your excitement. Why should your sister mind about Trudi? I don't see . . ."

"Be quiet, will you?" said Paul and listened on the landing.

Yes, it was Trudi's voice. "You're his sister, aren't you? Paul told me about you. How is he? I've been so worried about him."

"He's all right," snapped Lenchen, "quite all right." And she walked in front of Trudi into the kitchen. Triumph, bitter hatred, and despair, swept over her face; then it stiffened into a drawn white mask. "He's taking me to a dance to-night," she yelled at her brother, and, bursting into a storm of sobbing, she

ran into the other room. The key turned in the lock.

Emil stared at Paul, reached for his hat and coat with an air of bewilderment, and went.

Then for the first time Paul raised his eyes to look at Trudi. How helplessly she stood there, with bent head and on the point of tears. Under her little leather hat her smooth, fair bobbed hair hung down over her forehead and her pale, dimpled cheeks. As he looked at her a surge of joy rose up in the boy's heart. But his fear of Lenchen, who might burst in at any moment and cause even greater mischief, poisoned and stifled the lover's transient delight. His voice was unconsciously harsh as he said: "Oh, Trudi, I did beg you not to come here!"

The girl nodded, while the tears trickled down her cheeks and mouth and chin: with a weary gesture she wiped them away. And that dear voice of hers, that sounded now so thin and birdlike, melted the boy's ill-temper:

"I did so long to see you, and as you didn't turn up, I began to think such dreadful things, that I simply had to come. . . ." And with the half-smile of those who are too familiar with renunciation, she added: "But I'll go away now I've seen that you can stand up all right, and that it wasn't anything really serious."

"Nonsense, my darling: of course you must sit down," though he could not help wishing she would go away at once.

Trudi looked at him with a flash of eager happiness behind her tears.

Paul went up to her,—all the yearning of his heart burst forth, he flung his arms round her and kissed her desperately. "Trudi, my dear, sweet girl, don't worry any more. My sister is so horribly jealous, you know. She wants me all to herself. Sisters are often like that. But I can't love my own sister, can I,—though she's pretty enough. . . ."

"You mean you can't love her any more!" Lenchen's voice broke in harshly. . . . Trudi and Paul started back.

Lenchen had been listening behind the closed door, and shouted the words through the keyhole.

"Be quiet," cried Paul.

"Oh no, I won't," said Lenchen venomously, in the sing-song voice of children playing hide-and-seek. "Your new girl-friend shall hear everything,—the whole lovely truth."

Paul, in an access of despairing rage, rushed at the door and hammered with his fists on the thin wooden panels. "Be quiet, can't you, or I'll make you sorry for yourself."

"You dirty little liar," cried his sister with

a shrill laugh. " Don't you believe a word he says, my dear. When he's amused himself with you long enough, he'll turn you down just like me. He's a nice fellow, he is. Hark at him ; you'd like to kill me, wouldn't you, you nasty little swine, just because you're sick of me, eh ? "

Paul thundered on the door until he split the panels and his hands began to bleed. At last, when nearly exhausted, he realized his folly. And he turned, quivering all over.

The kitchen was empty . . . the door wide open. " Trudi, Trudi ! . . . " gasped Paul, tottering out on to the dark landing. The girl was leaning helplessly against the outer door with her whole body pressed against it. Her little black hat had fallen to the floor, and her shoulders quivered. Paul stroked and stroked her bent head like a man distraught. At last he stammered out : " Trudi, you don't really believe what she said, do you ? " And he asked her over and over again, in the imploring tones of a hungry child.

The girl stood up at last and gasped out with her head turned to the door : " I don't know."

Paul's blood stood still, and his head was quite empty. Again and again he repeated the question, in the monotonous tones of a street-hawker. He tried to pull the girl away

from the door, but her slim body seemed unbelievably strong.

"Paul," she said at last, stiffening herself with a great effort, "I want you to promise me something: What is most sacred to you? . . ."

". . . My mother."

"Well, tell me, on the soul of your mother, whether what your sister said is true or not."

For a long time Paul was silent. He stood benumbed in his dull despair, like a frozen figure. Then he said: "I've lost . . . everything," and added in a hollow voice that seemed to come from very far away: "Yes, what she said was true."

Trudi opened the door. As she went she reached out a wavering hand behind her, and her cold, light fingers touched his hand once more.

"But it's you I love, Trudi: only you!" cried Paul. "On my mother's soul it is."

The girl nodded, slipped through the half-opened door and said, before she shut it behind her, in a soft, clear voice: "You must not make your sister unhappy . . . she must be very dear to you."

The door closed abruptly. Paul wrenched it open. "Won't you see me any more?"

"You must give me time." The faint voice seemed to float up the stairs.

Paul remained standing in the open door like one who feels that the light is fading from his eyes. He could hear Trudi's weary footsteps, one by one, like drops falling on to his young heart. The rain pattered monotonously on the window-panes, and plashed along the gutters.

Paul stepped back, and his foot knocked against something. It was her hat. Then his grief broke, like a hurricane, as he bent down to pick it up. He buried his face in the shabby little object that smelt faintly of her hair. And he wept and wept in this beguiling fragrance of his dead happiness. . . .

Light fell into the gloom of the kitchen. Lenchen tip-toed into the room, now dark as the grave, in which a man sat and sobbed.

Paul looked up wearily. "Lenchen," he said, "don't go away. I'll be good to you, I'll do anything you like. . . . Stay here, let's play dominoes, will you?"

No answer. The kitchen door slammed. Paul rushed out, seized his sister by the arm, and pulled her back.

The girl struggled, scratched, and bit him in the hand.

"That's right, hurt me,—I don't mind, but for God's sake stay here." He clutched her like a dying man clinging to life. "Look, she's gone, she doesn't want to make you

unhappy. We won't either of us do anything to upset you. Come along, I'll be a kind brother to you again. Do think,—you know we didn't really love each other in that sort of way,—we were wicked and mad. It was a sin. If we'd gone on with it we should have been destroyed. Do listen, let's be like we used to be." And he shook her.

His sister felt like a piece of wood, like a lifeless waxen figure. Suddenly she wrenched herself free, flung open the door between them and said in a cooing voice: "I'm very grateful to Herr Paul Schwarzer for telling me he never loved me. It's very kind of Herr Schwarzer to want to set me free without hurting my feelings. And I'm now free to go my own way. Sold again, my dear!"

She dashed out, slammed the door. He heard her pattering downstairs: then silence. With slow and weary feet, not in the least as though he wanted to follow his sister, Paul wandered through the streets, bareheaded and with his jacket unbuttoned, like a whirling leaf in the cyclone of the mighty city. As he walked he hugged his sorrow: it benumbed his senses.

When he came back Emil was standing with a candle in his hand drawing on the kitchen wall. His mother was already asleep on his mattress. Reuscher quickly rubbed

out the drawing,—all that Paul saw was a friendly, outstretched hand. Paul crouched at the table and started whistling popular songs ;—he broke off suddenly in the middle of one and started another. The rain ran off his hair and his clothes and made pools on the floor. Reuscher stood by the window with his hands in his pockets, rocking himself from side to side. Then he began to talk to himself as though the last few hours had never been, as though he had wiped them from his consciousness as he had wiped his drawing off the wall.

" Yes," said Reuscher, " the same law rules the life of every man : it is God's purpose. We ought always to think of that,—it gives one so much strength. Human life often seems such a senseless turmoil, but if you look at it in that way, it suddenly seems all quiet and orderly. It reminds me of the ticking of a lot of clocks in a watchmaker's shop. And up above the sun goes on its way, and the stars, never too early, never too late, and the millions of clocks are set by them."

" Right, Herr Professor," cried Paul boisterously. " And when the rain gets into a clock the works get rusty and it won't go. It just stops ! The power of God, for ever and for ever, Amen ! Sleep the good sleep of faith, Herr Professor." And Paul went into

the next room, and dropped, half undressed, like a corpse on to his mattress.

That night Emil stood for a long time at the window. Then he murmured: "It's no good. . . . I must think it out all over again." And he drew a large question-mark on the dusty window-pane.

XIX

LENCHEN ran like one pursued to a certain Bar where Fritz had once taken her. Perhaps she would meet him . . . or if not, some one else. This was her only thought. The shallow longing to stun her mind, to lose herself in the foolish oblivion of intoxication, surged through her eddying blood. She had painted her lips a deep crimson with the rest of the lip-stick.

The Bar was a riot of red. The noise of a Tzigane band lilted and crashed through the little room so that the luxuriant flower-designs on the walls seemed positively to quiver.

Fritz was not there. No matter. Some one would soon turn up.

She sat down in an empty corner near the band and ordered a lemonade. The waiter replied contemptuously that they kept nothing of that kind—only liqueurs or wine: so she ordered a liqueur. When she had emptied her glass the waiter filled it again as a matter of course.

She had not long to wait.

An imposing, elegantly dressed gentleman with grey hair and a monocle sat down opposite her and after a brief exchange of glances invited her to dance.

Lenchen felt that she had never danced like this, in such a wild and abandoned way,—not even at the Englischer Hof. Oh, well, what did it matter?—it was all a whirl of red and kisses and gipsy melodies. And champagne was good to drink.

The gentleman had ordered a bottle of "*Henkel Privat*," and the waiter was already putting a second one into the bucket.

"Drink, little brother, drink, and leave your cares at home. . . . Quite right, Mister Gipsy," thought she, and she hurled her glass at the wall. "Waiter, fetch me another!" . . . She didn't care what Paul and Trudi . . . That was . . . all . . . And her senses reeled.

She was now sitting on the gentleman's knee: and she made him laugh so much that his monocle fell out of his eye into the glass of champagne. He switched off the light; and the waiter drew a velvet curtain across the alcove.

Late next morning Lenchen awoke in a strange, large room. There was a writing-table, and many books against the walls, and

in front of the green curtains the nude marble figure of a man.

The girl was much impressed, and thought he must be a nobleman or a rich manufacturer at least. And she felt so cosy as she cuddled up in the polar-bear skin. "I shall never be able to get up here," she thought.

Anyhow she was dreadfully tired, and there was a heavy feeling at the back of her head. "He won't mind if I have a bit of a sleep, will he?" she thought to herself. "He's been so nice to me. But where has he gone? I'm sure he was lying there a little while ago. . . . It's a fine wide sofa,—it would hold four of us at home. What nice things rich people do have!"

When she woke up again there stood beside her a tall crystal vase with a huge bouquet of red roses: and propped against it was a letter as large as a copy-book; on it, in a bold, flamboyant hand, was written: "To the sweet little cat!"

Lenchen now felt like an important personage, a Diva of the Films, or a Princess. She knew from her experience of the Cinema that the proper thing to do now was to bury her face in her admirer's bouquet, and, with slanted brows, but a smile of recollection on her lips, kiss the letter lightly and then tear it open.

She did all this in excellent style: and

with eyes ecstatically closed she also kissed the bank-note that she found in the envelope. And finally she pressed it to her bosom.

Suddenly she became conscious that she was naked under the warm, soft coverlet. That sobered her for the moment and made her think. "So we've got as far as that, have we? Am I a bad woman, and shall I come to a bad end, as Paul told me? My poor Paul, you don't know what you are talking about. You and your factory-girl can't know the ways of good society. They drink champagne, my lad, and put the light out, and it's all lovely! And next morning there's a bunch of roses on a little table, and a little table made of real gold, the sort of thing you've never seen. And money,—more money than you can earn in a fortnight. I can buy myself a lovely pink chemise now and some knickers, and later on a pearl necklace, and a motor-car of my own. Be happy with your Trudi,—I'll give you my blessing. I shall soon be whirling past in silver fox furs, with painted lips, while you'll be selling newspapers or bootlaces on the kerbstone.

"But where's my little Uncle gone? Ah, there's a card in the envelope: 'Dear little cat,' the girl read out to herself, 'please forgive my going off while you were asleep, but

I have got an appointment at eleven. Come again to-morrow evening, will you? When you want to go, there is a bell on the left over the sofa. Jonny, the servant, will bring you some breakfast and let you out later on. With a kiss on your dear wicked little mouth. Your Theo.'

"Ho ho! Now for the great world, and happiness," cried Lenchen exultingly, and did a war-dance round the room. She read the note again and again and exultantly kissed the letter, until her lips were quite inky. Then she dressed. These dirty rags of hers were really horrible. Nice clothes are the first thing that Theo must give me. I don't want to feel ashamed before him, and Jonny. 'No, I won't ring, I'd sooner go without breakfast.'"

She rummaged a little among the strange gentleman's papers: from the envelopes of his letters he seemed to be an author, his name was Theodor Anwand. Lenchen screwed up her nose. She wished he had been a Baron or a manufacturer. However, he did seem to have some money. She looked for a bit of paper on which to write to him, chose a large yellow sheet headed "Tax Collector's Office, Wilmersdorf, Nord,—Assessment for the year——," and covered with all manner of printed matter; and she scrawled across it:

"Dear, dear Herr Anwand. I will certainly come to-morrow evening, if I may count on a black silk dress, lace-trimmed undies, and a real fur jacket. I kiss your nice, wicked old lips, and beg to sign myself, yours respectfully, Helene Schwarzer, dancer."

Then she crept on tiptoe through the hall, where were more books and pictures and statues, and got out into the street unobserved.

XX

In the early hours of that same day, as the first cold snow-grey morning light glimmered into the room, Paul awoke with a start. The events of the previous evening gradually rose to the surface of his consciousness. He longed to plunge in a heavy all-engulfing sleep again . . . to think no more, to know no more. . . . But his hammering heart had dispelled the haze of slumber.

Careful not to awake his mother from the sleep she could enjoy only on Sunday morning, Paul slipped out of bed and dressed.

"I'll get out of this and never come back." He mechanically repeated the resolve he had made while wandering about in the rain the day before. "Either something dreadful will happen, or it will be Lenchen that won't come back one day. One of us must go,—there isn't room for both." He jerked his coat on. "All right, I'll go. But I must see Trudi first and find out whether yesterday was really good-bye. If she sticks to it, I'll give up the game,—I'm finished." He looked

down at his mother, and said in his heart, Good-bye. He felt as though he had murdered her.

He wanted to bid a silent farewell to Lenchen too. That would be easier,—he was going for her sake.

His pulse throbbed out: "Too late: it's all too late."

Stricken with fear and with a sense of guilt that gripped him by the throat, Paul slipped into the kitchen and shook Emil until he awoke. Lenchen was not there. . . . She had not come back!

"Well, we must look for her," said Reuscher, and put his clothes on.

"But supposing Mother wakes up and we aren't there."

"Then we must wait," said Emil in the same calm tone, washing himself at the sink. "In the meantime, Paul, I think you had better tell me the whole truth. It is difficult to advise you otherwise."

In halting tones the lad confided in his friend what had happened after that evening at the fair: and his experience with his lady, and Lenchen's affair with Fritz. He said nothing about his sister having led him on,—he took all the blame upon himself.

Reuscher tried to encourage his friend, but without avail. Hardly had Paul finished his

story than he was seized with an access of self-destructive fury. "I can't stand this," he burst out. "Try to make it up with Mother if you can. I must go."

Emil struggled with him,—Paul flung open the cupboard and grabbed the bread-knife.

"You've got no sense of decency," he hissed at the young man, and shook him savagely. "First you behave like that with Lenchen, and then you want to desert your mother in the night. That's a nice sort of thing to do! Here you are and here you stay."

With a strength that surprised himself he forced Paul down on to the kitchen chair and walked up and down in front of him like a sentry. "It's quite clear to me that you have one plain duty, and that is to bring Lenchen back here."

Paul sat in a huddled collapse, and shook his head feebly. "She won't come back,—not so long as I'm here."

"Well, we must try. You owe that to your mother. And you must control yourselves in the future: after all you're human beings, not . . . not . . ."

"Well, say it, . . . ! Beasts!" said Paul with a laugh. Then, after a pause, he added more calmly: "You're acting the Professor again, you know, Emil. I've fought against

all this as hard as I could. But something was stronger than my own will and my hatred of what I was doing."

Emil gazed at the large question-mark now frozen on the window-pane.

The mother was standing in the door. Her face, with its half-shut eyes, was thin and pale above the thick folds of the man's overcoat —she had the appearance of a sleep-walker, or one long dead. At last she raised her eyelids and looked at Paul as though he were still a little boy and very ill. And he bent his head over her knees.

"You must not be ashamed, Paul," and her voice was as soothing as the touch of her hand: "I heard what you said,—I've known it all along. I could tell you what was stronger than your will." And with a slightly trembling forefinger she described a circle round herself. Then she buttoned up her son's jacket, smoothed his hair, and gently stroked his cheeks. "We must suffer for what we have done wrong, Paul, my dear. It is only wicked to do more wrong, instead of facing what we have to bear. Go along now, you two. When Lenchen comes, I want her to find me alone. If she . . . doesn't come . . . well, it's my fault." And again she described the circle in the air.

For the first time for years Paul kissed his

mother. She smiled her gay, unwearied smile. "It's a fine morning and the cold air will freshen you up: you've both wanted a good blow for a long time."

When she was alone, she seemed to shrink into her trailing overcoat, and her face grew grey. She crept into the inner room, and softly—so as not to disturb Erna,—took a greasy yellowed account book from the depths of a cupboard, crouched on the edge of Paul's bed, and ran her finger down the rows of figures. At the head of the first page stood a good round sum. She, the cashier's daughter, had brought that with her as her dowry. The opposite pages were all full of small entries for housekeeping, and much larger ones: for Gustav. "All gone in gambling and drinking," she murmured with set lips,—their lovely little three-roomed flat, the furniture, and all. Then came the war. After that he was good and worked hard,—but it was too late. The gas-poisoning had finished him. . . . She closed her eyes. Tears dropped one by one on to the open book.

XXI

LENCHEN arrived late in the morning. When her mother opened the door, she turned to run away. In her hasty movement, she dropped a parcel which she was carrying under her arm. There were stockings in it, and a lace-edged chemise, and a pair of silk knickers. She had forgotten that it was Sunday and expected to find only Paul and Erna. They would not have asked her any questions.

There was something so imploring in her mother's eyes, that the daughter went obediently past her into the kitchen.

"Where were you all night, Lenchen?" asked her mother, bent over the baby-linen that had to be ready soon. Erna's baby was due in a few days.

"I went to Lotti Schulz's place. . . . It was her birthday. And the party went on so late that Herr Schulz thought I couldn't go home alone and had better sleep there."

"And what have you got in the parcel?" asked the widow without looking up.

"Oh, just a few old things of Lotti's. Frau Schulz gave them to me, because I hadn't anything,—stockings or blouses or vests."

"I wish you wouldn't tell lies, Lenchen; it is very wicked of you," said her mother, more troubled than angry.

"Tell lies,—what do you mean?" said the girl angrily. "If you're going to talk like that, I'd sooner clear out!" and she made a movement towards the door.

The mother unfastened the parcel, which she had meantime picked up, stared heavily at the red silk knickers, and the bill, and then—her eyes dim with grief—at Lenchen. Her dry lips parted,—but her voice failed her. She felt for Lenchen's arm, and drew her, now only feebly resisting, down on to the chair in front of her.

Lenchen began to cry, in angry defiance and also in something like remorse. Suddenly she screamed out at her mother, as though the old woman had been deaf. "It's Paul's fault, and no one else's: and now you know it!"

Her mother dropped her hand in a gesture of denial, and shook her head several times. "It isn't only Paul's fault: leave him out of it anyhow. We must talk about what you were doing last night. And you will listen to your mother, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, Paul's your darling, isn't he? He can do as he likes,—you wouldn't talk to him like that. He's a dirty sneak. And Erna,—you do anything Erna asks you,—and now you're knitting socks for her bastard baby. Why do you want to go for me like this, I should like to know?"

The mother looked at her vacantly. The shadows under her eyes grew more hollow, and her voice was half stifled with tears. "I love you all just the same, and I've tried to do my best for you all. You ought to be ashamed to speak to me so. If I try to manage Paul more by saying nothing than by talking to him, it's simply because he takes everything so hard and has more to bear than you two. Erna will always know how to look after herself—besides, she's grown up, and must know what she's doing. And you're a much happier sort of creature,—you're so independent and full of fun . . . yes, you're much too quick and flighty." The widow went up to her daughter, stroked her shoulder and said imploringly: "Lenchen, you're my little girl, aren't you? . . . Don't do such a thing again, will you? . . . Don't be tempted by pleasure and money. It is not what it looks like and you'll pay for it later by a long life of remorse. Will you promise me to be my own good little girl?"

At the bottom of her heart Lenchen was moved. She clung to her mother and made up her mind not to hurt her feelings any more. So she nodded in answer, and sobbed out: "Yes."

"But you must keep your word, Lenchen," added the mother, with a look of glad relief. "You don't want to go to the Catholic Home down in the country where the Sisters wanted to bring you up after your Confirmation. But your father didn't like the idea."

The mother hoped this warning would effectually save her daughter,—for she feared her passionate disposition. But it had an opposite and disastrous effect on Lenchen. She suddenly realized what she had so hastily promised to give up: deliverance from these vile surroundings, and a new life full of wealth and all manner of delight. She was furious with herself for being tricked by a silly outburst of emotion into such a piece of folly. All her childish feeling for her mother was quite dispelled. And her revulsion made her more and more inclined to break her word.

At this moment Erna cried out from the further room: "Mother!"

Lenchen hurriedly tied up her parcel again. This was no place for her. Here, in those two dismal rooms, five—six people lived, loved, produced children, and died. But she

could lie in a polar-bear skin, on a sofa as wide as the whole kitchen. She could be the little friend of a very smart gentleman who called her his " little cat," put the loveliest roses by her bedside, and wrote her an affectionate letter with money inside it. What had she done to be threatened with the Catholic Home where she would have to mend stockings all day, and play the harmonium? " I don't think ! " said Lenchen to herself. " And all the time Paul's amusing himself with Trudi, and Erna's having other men's babies ! No, I should be a fool if I went on with it. . . . I'm through with it. I hope you'll all be happy with your bread and margarine and the food left over by the Hasselbachs. You won't see me any more ! "

" Lenchen ! " called the widow from the inner room, " run to the chemist, and get those drops for Ernchen. The prescription's on the kitchen table."

" All right," said Lenchen, turned over the prescription, and wrote on the back of it: " It's all Paul's fault : " left the note on the kitchen table and rushed from the house.

And now, thought she, for my golden future.

But at the moment the future was grey and empty as that February morning.

She had to wait until to-morrow evening.

What on earth should she do with herself meanwhile? Fortunately she still had six marks odd left out of her present.

Lenchen's haughty resolve was slightly shaken. She wandered disconsolately through the streets, swinging her parcel in her chilly fingers. The air was bitingly cold and she still had only her old clothes to wear. She went into a public lavatory and put on her new underwear: but this made her colder than ever, for she was not used to the thin silk stockings; still, she was no longer ashamed to be seen in the more intimate encounters of life.

She went into a café and got thoroughly warm. The place was full of girls drinking chocolate who, like her, had nothing better to do with themselves. They surveyed Lenchen unfavourably, scenting a piratical competitress. And there were all sorts of men who peered into her face, and winked and nodded at her. Lenchen paid no attention,—had she not a friend of her very own,—a real gentleman, too? And when a student sat down at her table with an air of assurance and began to address her familiarly, she turned haughtily away, and merely answered: "I don't think we've been introduced, have we?" And the student had to retire, crestfallen and angry, to his own place.

The fugitive passed the night in a little hotel in the Schlegelstrasse: and the next day in a café again.

As a matter of fact she hated being alone in a strange room. She thought of her mother, and her conscience pricked her. But she could not go back now. No, she would never return to Paul and the little room, where there would be soon a squalling infant and a reek of damp napkins. She couldn't stand babies.

"Yes, we're on our own now, Helene," she said to her image in the mirror the next morning. "We've got to depend on our own attractions and the favour of people called men! Well, I know how to catch them all right."

She put her face close to the glass, turned her head this way and that, and tried various expressions, pert, coquettish, and enticing.

"Yes," she said appraisingly to herself, "not at all bad. But your lips should be fuller, and you need to keep them a little open. And that sideways look of yours is quite fetching. But you mustn't keep your eyes half shut, Helene,—that looks so common. People like Trudi do, I daresay, but you must always give your little Uncle a nice frank smile, and he'll do anything you like!"

XXII

The second night after that Sunday Erna gave birth to her baby: it was a girl. Paul and Emil had already gone to sleep in the kitchen when they were awakened by Erna's shrieks. The whole house echoed with them: they seemed to burst forth from the womb of earth, and the enveloping night was tense with that agony.

Paul covered his ears with his hands,—he could not listen. He was buried in his own misery, like a prisoner crouching in the darkest corner of his cell. Lenchen had not come back, and there was no word from Trudi; she had made no answer to his frantic appeal,—and yet it must have moved her. He did not know how to get in touch with her,—he knew neither where she lived nor where she worked. So he was forced to wait while the days passed pitilessly by, and each one seemed an eternity. He watched for every post with fluttering heart. How he hated the heavy tread of the postman as he panted inexorably past the door. He often longed to fling it

open and shout: "But you must have a letter from Trudi, do give it me!" But he never did: he crept back into the kitchen as though he had received news of Trudi's death. And with the same devouring restlessness he always hoped that Lenchen would suddenly reappear. At the sound of every light footstep on the stairs he rushed to the door.

A fresh shriek from Erna stung him out of his dull brooding. If only she would stop screaming like this! It sounded like a wild animal. He swore in his exasperation, and flung himself over towards the wall.

"Yes," whispered Emil, "when you come to think of it, what agonies our mothers have suffered over all of us! It ought to make us realize what our mothers go through: nothing but misery all their lives, and . . ."

"Emil! Once and for all I'll stand no more of your dismal preaching! It sticks in my throat like the filthy soup I have to swallow every morning. I've no use for all your Bible-texts. You'd better keep them for yourself!"

Reuscher, too, was tired of being constantly abused by Paul.

"Now, look here, Paul," he said, "I won't have you talk to me like that. Just you go through what I've had to, and you'll be thankful to have some one who means as well by

you as I do. Who was it looked after you a little while ago, and walked about with you when you were behaving like a lunatic? . . . You try and keep your temper, or I don't know what will become of you."

Paul jumped up. "If you can't keep your mouth shut, blast you, I shall have to go somewhere else. I can't stand it,—I shall do something I shall be sorry for. . . ."

"You'd better go back to the Boxing Hall, my lad," said Reuscher mockingly, not in the least alarmed. "Or you might try another row in the beer-cellar!"

With one leap Paul stood with raised fist by his friend's mattress.

Emil surveyed him from the floor with clear, untroubled eyes. The pale reflection of the snowy darkness without veiled his face in the faint aura of solitude and purity which had so struck the lad on the first night they had met, when he felt the waft of the black angel's cool breath.

He let his fist fall, and passed his hands over his forehead as though he were awakening from sleep. Then with a shamefaced laugh he held out his right hand to his friend. Emil took it, merely saying: "All right."

"What do you mean,—'all right'?"

"I'll help you to find Trudi."

Then they considered what had best be

done. There was only one possible means,—and that was Franz Bolle. While they were discussing how Bolle could be induced to disclose his former friend's address the doctor came into the kitchen, followed by the widow, carrying a bundle of towels. While the doctor was washing his hands, he assured the mother that her daughter and the baby were going on splendidly. "It was a model confinement, Frau Schwarzer!"

The mother began to cough. "Now, now, Frau Schwarzer, still that cough?" asked the doctor paternally in quite a different tone. "Yes, you do look worn out. I'll send the District Nurse early to-morrow morning, she'll help you. No, no trouble, and it won't cost you a penny." He patted the widow's hand encouragingly, wished Emil and Paul good evening, and turned to go.

"One moment, Herr Doctor,"—Emil, in a sudden impulse, laid a hand on his arm—"I wish you would examine Paul's hip."

In some astonishment the doctor laid down his bag and listened to Emil's story.

"And you tell me all this three weeks after the event and at two o'clock in the morning!" he burst out furiously. "Really, you can limp for the rest of your life, for all I care. Well, let's see."

He felt the great bruise, Paul groaned, and

the doctor continued in an access of angry satisfaction :

" If you hadn't got such a fine mother, young man, I'd cut off half your backside for you, do you hear ? What with internal bleeding and torn muscles, you might well have been a hopeless cripple. There must be a clot, too. . . . Now, now ! " he said soothingly to the mother, who had called softly, " Paul, dear ! "

" Well, my lad," said the doctor, when the painful quarter of an hour was over. " You'll have to lie up for a fortnight, with compresses . . . so . . . and I'll come every other day and give you some massage. Basta ! "

Paul glanced at Emil with a look of mingled reproach and despondency. Reuscher replied with the smile of a prize-winner in a lottery :

" May I come and get a certificate from you in the morning, doctor, that Paul can't go to the Boxing Hall for the present ? "

When the meaning of this question had been explained to the doctor, he nodded grimly. " Of course. The young man will have to let me do his boxing for the next few weeks."

As soon as the doctor had gone out on the landing with his mother, Paul said : " Emil, you're a beast ! But I must say you managed it very well."

On the following evening Emil Reuscher called upon Herr Grello with the certificate. The latter pretended to be amazed and then furious, as though he had never heard of the brawl.

"Then perhaps you will send for Herr Braillard," suggested Emil.

The latter appeared after considerable delay, still soaked with sweat from the fight he had just finished. He rubbed himself with much deliberation while Grello let loose at him a positive cannonade of curses and threats.

"I'll fine you a hundred marks for this, Braillard: if not more! Do you think I take the trouble to train people to be knocked about by great brutes like you?"

Bolle thrust out his great blood-congested head on its gross neck, and his narrow forehead wrinkled into deep folds above the shapeless nose. "What's all this? I suppose you didn't enjoy the scrap, eh? Why, I saw you hopping around as pleased as any one. Got me one in the eye, blast him! And now you want to fine me a hundred marks! Oh, come off it! Get your hundred marks from Hindenburg's Cripples' Home,—don't ask me for it!"

The two great ruffians began to rumble with fury and looked like coming to blows.

"Excuse me, Herr Grello!" Emil broke in.

"I should like to ask Herr Braillard a question."

They stopped, and glared feebly at Reuscher, who beckoned Bolle to the door. "I'll ask Herr Grello to let the whole thing drop," he said, "and Paul won't say anything about it, if you will do me a small service."

At first Bolle would agree to nothing, he bellowed at Reuscher and asked him what he was doing there anyhow. Only after Reuscher had pressed a five-mark note into his hand did he become more amenable.

"Oh, if that's all it is,—Trudi's address. But I don't know it, she always came to me."

But after another five-mark note he managed to remember the factory where he had often been to fetch her.

Emil slipped out at once and left them to their dispute, which broke out again at once.

And Paul's friend thought that Paul might thank his Maker that he did not need to enter the Boxing Hall again.

XXIII

The widow endured in silence her grief over Lenchen. She tore up the prescription with the message: "It's all Paul's fault," slowly into small and ever smaller pieces; her lips were sunken and there was a dreadful waxen look upon her face.

Morning and evening she sat on her chair in the kitchen, her small figure crouching on the edge of it as though she were there on sufferance, like a poor lost thing received into some kindly house. The trees in the park, and the birds, now few and, like her, silent, no longer heard her cheerful greeting on the way to the Hasselbachs: though she sometimes looked up at the leaden, vacant winter sky. And as she sat huddled at the kitchen table with a sort of listening air, the bread that was her evening meal often fell from her indifferent fingers. Once and once only—Emil was drawing and Paul was already asleep—she spoke: "In a place," she said, "where there aren't any curtains to the windows you can't expect the children to turn

out well. It's all a matter of good or bad luck."

Conscientiously, but no longer with the cheerful zeal of former days, she still did her daily tasks, helped the District Nurse, went punctually to the Hasselbachs', came home late, and cleaned her office on Saturday evening. Frau Hasselbach thought she was growing more absent-minded every day, and found fault with her more often. In earlier days this used to upset the widow, but now she almost liked to hear hard words because she felt she had deserved them. She did, indeed, think that God, to whom she often prayed for Lenchen, had more reason to be angry with her than Frau Hasselbach.

Paul spent the days lying on his bed like a man stretched upon a rack. Every morning he said to himself: "No, I can't stand any more of it: I'm going to get up, go to the rubber factory, and then look for Lenchen. . . ." He quivered as though with fever every time he looked at his mother.

There was a change in Emil since the arrival of Erna's baby. He now drew seldom, and spoke little. He went out very early in the morning and usually did not come back until the evening. He was looking for another post. And one afternoon he came home with happy eyes, tears of joy running

down his cheeks, and his moustache, that used to hang down so mournfully, positively bristling with pride.

"Yes, I've found another job, and a very good one too, in a big firm that does a lot of decorating of new buildings. How about that? Didn't I tell you, Paul, that when I had some duties to think of, I should go up in the world again?"

"Then I suppose you'll be moving soon?" said Paul.

"Of course. We can afford two rooms now. Besides, we couldn't be here when we're married."

At this point Erna came in. She had quickly recovered her strength and was already looking after her child. The nurse had been able to go two days before.

"I've no intention of moving," cried Erna. "Why should we waste our money on two furnished rooms? and that's all we could afford at first, Emil. No, we shall be quite comfortable here until we've saved enough to be able to take a place of our own. When we're both earning money, we could manage that in two years' time. And you've got the kitchen walls to draw on,—you wouldn't be allowed to do that in furnished rooms."

"But how shall we all manage?" Emil asked.

"Oh, quite simple," explained his future wife. "Mother and Paul can have the kitchen and we three can live in the other room."

The widow shook her head, and Emil would not agree to this suggestion.

"No," he said: "we can't rob Mother and Paul of their own room."

Erna then lost her temper and said she wouldn't marry him at all: and what would he do then?

Emil, who was so delighted to have acquired some obligations and some work as well, would have given way; but the mother, with a firmness that the others had never seen before, which indeed quite took them aback and reduced Erna to silence, spoke out:

"I'll keep you here until you're married and not a month longer! When too many people live too close together, they go wrong and dreadful things happen to people like us. Erna's baby shall grow up in its own room."

On the ninth day of his treatment, when the doctor was not coming, Paul could not endure the torments of uncertainty a moment longer. In the early afternoon he dressed himself and made his way in the direction of Trudi's factory. He was weak from so much lying

down, and his legs were stiff, but the grinding anxiety as to whether he should find Trudi, and what she would say to him, drove him breathlessly on his way.

By four o'clock he had reached the entrance to the factory, two square red pillars set in an interminable cast-iron railing : but he was told that no one came off work until five. Paul felt ill and exhausted, and he asked the fat porter—a personage with the cheeks of a Father Christmas and red bristles under his nose—if he might sit in his lodge. The porter nodded ungraciously, and pulled him out a stool in his stifling little room. Paul asked whether overtime was being worked in the inner tube department that day. The porter merely shook his head, and fell to gulping coffee out of a tin mug. After about five minutes he said : " No, there's not much doing these days."

" Eight hours at that sort of job is quite enough," observed Paul.

" Hoho ! " roared the fat man through his sodden lips. " So you think so, do you ? Listen here : every week these swine want more pay, always more pay, but they don't want to do any more work for it. Now what's going to be the end of that, I ask you. The whole place will go smash. How long do you think you'd see smoke coming out of

that chimney?" And he opened his arms to the smoking chimney in a vast embrace that might well have encircled a beer cask. "Five years, or eight, perhaps: and then we'd have to shut down, eh?"

Paul felt his anger rising, but he did not allow himself to say a word in reply. Perhaps this fat creature could injure Trudi.

"You see," pursued the porter, "the working men have got no pride these days, they're hardly men at all. If they've got enough to eat and drink, they're quite happy. They don't want any more. Well, what sort of life is that, I ask you? They let themselves be bullied by the foreman and the managers and they go home and work it off by beating their wives. That's what working men are like, I can tell you, because I know."

Paul jumped off his stool, but at the last moment mastered his anger again with the thought of Trudi in his mind, and merely said: "It's terribly hot in here. I think I'll wait outside:" and he went.

Shivering and wretched, with his hands clenched in his jacket pockets, he stood waiting opposite the entrance.

Lorries rumbled in and out, and, on one occasion, a private motor-car. The fat man rushed out of his cubby-hole and hastily bowed his red cranium.

"Was that the pride that the working man had not got?" thought Paul with disgust: "the pride of the proletarian who gets ten marks more a month, and a uniform cap."

The sirens screamed. At first in ones and twos, then in a crowd, the dark, hurrying figures approached across the yard, and scattered at the entrance. One or two were laughing boisterously, some were talking, but most of them went silently and wearily on their various ways. A few of the younger men waited for some of the girls and walked off arm-in-arm.

In the centre of the advancing stream was Trudi. Her smooth fair hair and her pale face poised above her thin coat looked like a distant solitary light over a dark expanse of waters. She did not notice the waiting figure, and was just turning off in the opposite direction.

Paul touched her arm. A flash of fear passed across her face, which then once more grew tense with pain.

"Yes, I couldn't bear it any longer," burst out Paul in answer to her dumb amazement. "Walk a little way with me."

The girl followed him doubtfully, not raising her eyes from the pavement. He tried to take her hand, but she snatched

it away and slipped it into the fold of her coat.

"Do you mind my having come?" asked the young man gloomily.

He felt her gently shrug her shoulders. Then from far away, as her face had looked among the crowd, came her voice. "But you know, Paul . . . your sister. . . ."

"Lenchen?" broke in Paul eagerly. "But she isn't with us any more." And in his voice was an involuntary ring of exultation that made him feel ashamed.

Trudi threw a shocked glance at her friend, whose wan cheeks flushed with sudden red.

"Oh? Where is she then, Paul?"

The lad flushed more deeply still. "Mother has sent her off to an aunt at Kottbus. Our uncle has a bakery there."

The girl guessed he was lying, and again looked down at the pavement.

"Why did your mother send her away?"

Paul was revolted by the need to tell yet more lies. But his agony over Trudi left him no choice. "Lenchen is lost," he said in answer to his conscience. "No one can expect me to risk Trudi for her." And he answered with a nonchalant air, as if it were a matter of common knowledge which only Trudi had not heard:

"There wasn't enough room at home, and it was bad for Lenchen. When too many people live too close together they go wrong, and all sorts of dreadful things happen to people like us."

A faint smile hovered round Trudi's lips, and the drawn look of many sleepless nights and destroying doubts gradually faded from her face. If this was true, then there was no one to come between them: and an agonized hope, of which she had long since despaired, began to rise in her mind again. She squeezed Paul's hand imploringly.

"Is that really true?" she asked.

He meant to nod and say, Yes, with an air of nonchalance, but the cowardice of his behaviour suddenly came over him so vividly, that he could only produce a wavering gesture of assent.

Trudi let her hand fall from his and dropped her eyes once more. Tears were welling up under her lowered lids.

"First I make Lenchen wretched and then I try and pose as a man of honour! Pah! this won't do," thought Paul. "Where is my pride that made me despise the porter? . . . No, if I can't keep Trudi by telling her the whole truth, I would sooner put an end to everything, myself included."

"Trudi, I have told you lies," confessed

Paul. The girl flinched as though she had been struck with a whip, and the lad took her arm. "But if you are really fond of me, Trudi, don't run away again to-day. I must tell you all about it first: and then you can make up your mind."

She could not answer, but she followed him to a little café at the corner.

They sat down at a secluded table and to the accompaniment of the rasping clatter of an ancient gramophone, Paul confided in his friend what had happened between Lenchen and himself. He was now calm once more, and his determination to tell the truth had given him an air of fine and cheerful resolve.

Trudi, as he proceeded with his story, looked him more frankly and freely in the eyes. The lad's good feeling that, in describing the occurrences, led him to take pains to shield his sister, revealed to her his clean and manly nature, aroused her confidence and a feeling of such joyful faith in him, that while he was pouring out his agitation over Lenchen's flight, for which Paul took the entire blame on himself, she began to stroke his hand.

The boy looked at her nervously and said at the end of it all: "Now I've told you everything, Trudi. And according to what you may think, now you know about it, you

must stay with me or go away. I know what I shall do either way; I just wanted to put things straight between us."

"What would you do if I left you?" she asked with a pretended seriousness that quite deceived Paul.

"I shan't tell you." And he answered all her other questions with the same immovable refusal.

"And what will you do if I go on sitting here?"

"I will marry you as soon as I am able," answered Paul with the same expectant resolve. "I have learnt from all this that anything else is no good, and only brings unhappiness."

Trudi could no longer play hide-and-seek with joy. She suddenly flung herself at him quite without regard for the other people in the place, and hugged and kissed any part of him that was not covered by his jacket, scarf, and cap.

"Trudi! My dear!" cried Paul, and swung her on to his knee.

There were shouts of laughter in the café. The proprietor appeared in list-slippers carrying two glasses of grog and peered at them waggishly from either side: but they did not notice him. "Hi!" he finally shouted in a throaty voice. "If you two are going to get

married, I'll have a drink on it. Here's your very best."

"Here's your health," cried Trudi to the company, waving at them from Paul's knee, with flashing eyes. "Here's to you all."

The host put a waltz on the gramophone and clapped as the pair whirled past.

Then Paul, to whom Emil had given a little money from time to time, stood drinks all round, and did cart-wheels through the room.

Next morning the doctor was angry because Paul had got up of his own accord. Of course he soon saw something had happened, and the impudent smile with which Paul defended himself did not irritate him. . . . In four days the pains had quite disappeared.

Many afternoons he waited outside the factory and argued with the fat porter, but he kept his temper because these disputes saved him from the painful business of counting the minutes.

As soon as Trudi came, he put his arm through hers: and they went off as fast as they could. She was often tired and depressed with her deadening work: then he walked home with her and told her all sorts of comical stories on the way. On good days they visited Heaven, as Trudi called it. There were three degrees of Heaven known to that

pair: the Cinema, though they saw little of the show, but they liked the darkness; the Dance Hall; and Paradise, which was represented by a little bare room that they hired by the hour.

XXIV

MEANWHILE Lenchen had been having a pitiable time. In her resolve to leave home, and in her hopes of a glorious career, she had been largely relying on Dr. Anwand: but when she presented herself on the appointed evening she found only Jonny, who solemnly shook his silvery head once, like an automatic doll. Dr. Anwand was very sorry, but he had had to leave town that morning.

Lenchen, who could not imagine how she had fallen out of favour with her elegant friend, said:

"Then I can wait here till Dr. Anwand comes back."

Again Jonny shook his head, once and once only: "I am sorry, but Dr. Anwand left no orders about that."

"Nonsense, old boy, why should he?" said Lenchen with fear and horror at her heart, trying to put the servant in his place. "I'm his little friend: he calls me his little cat, you know. Why, Dr. Anwand will be

awfully pleased to find me here when he comes back."

The servant seemed exceedingly doubtful of this, for he replied curtly: "None of the ladies has ever lived here," and shut the door in her face.

There she stood, homeless, and with hardly one mark in her pocket. She began by sitting on the stairs and pouring out all the anger and misery of her little fluttering heart in a wail of weeping. Then she wandered listlessly through the fog and damp of the winter evening. A long line of motor-cars slid past her, and in them were gentlemen in fur coats and tall-hats going to a dance or a theatre. The few passers-by were buried in the up-turned collars of their overcoats and furs.

Lenchen Schwarzer tramped on and on along the slippery pavements in her short cloth jacket and her grey cotton stockings. What should she do? Unconsciously her feet, that seemed to grow heavier and heavier, were carrying her to where she knew there was bed, and food, and affection,—home to her mother. She suddenly found herself at the corner of the dim familiar street that she had known from childhood. There, a few paces in front, she caught sight of Oskar Gellert marching along with his usual pompous

stride. Lenchen turned in horror and ran like one pursued until she reached another part of the city. Never again,—she would never go home! She had turned her back on the Schwarzer family once and for all. She would sooner drop down dead than crawl back to that awful life and that miserable room. Pride and defiance still held her to her resolve.

"I'll show you,—I don't need you any more! I'm young, and I'm good to look at! You wait!"

She began to feel much more cheerful and finally found herself outside the Bar in which she had made the Author's acquaintance on the day before.

"Why shouldn't I have another bit of luck to-day?" she thought; "and find an even nicer friend?"

The waiter recognized her and brought a bottle of champagne. Lenchen wearily waved it away and ordered a small glass of liqueur.

The Bar was empty, as they usually are on Monday. Only a few girls were there on the same errand as Lenchen, and two clerks, who could not afford a bottle of wine between them. Later on a man in a top-hat came in; but he was extremely drunk, and could find nothing better to do than to go on drinking and fall asleep at intervals.

At three o'clock the place shut and they were all turned out into a cold and drizzly winter night. Lenchen felt quite ill with hunger and leaden weariness. At last she found she could sit in the warm waiting-room at the Silesia railway-station, buy a sandwich with her last pennies, and sleep on a wooden bench until the morning.

When she woke up she saw a traveller wearing a check cap and breeches, staring into her face. He smiled at her across the table, thrusting out his stubbly chin, called her his little moth, and asked her to come with him. He had missed his train and had looked in for a cup of coffee. But he had noticed her asleep and thought it worth while waiting until she awoke. Lenchen shuddered, she thought him horrible: he looked like a chimpanzee. But there is not much choice, when a girl is sick with hunger and has not a penny in her pocket. In a little hotel that provided for such encounters, he made amends for the time he had waited, and in a way that accorded with his cap and breeches; but he was generous enough to present the girl with five marks.

But soon she had to learn that all men were not so unexacting as her friend of the railway station: some of them beat her, or, what was worse, gave her no money if she showed

herself unsympathetic and did not do what her customers wanted. It was true that she sometimes fell in with decent, kindly fellows, mostly students or the like. But they were greatly in the minority. They did not much care to talk to a thin, hungry-looking girl in a short jacket and cotton stockings.

Men came and went, and the days passed. A few were kind, most of them were not. When she found a man, she had enough to eat for twenty-four hours and to pay for her cheap hotel-room : and then, for a long while, there would be no one, and she must go hungry and spend the night in the railway-station.

At first Lenchen cried a great deal, repented bitterly and struggled against the temptation to go home. If she had known earlier what the life of a public girl was like, and what beasts men were, she would a thousand times sooner have endured the one room, which now in her recollection seemed something like a paradise : and a thousand times sooner darned stockings and said her rosary.

But now it was all too late. The shame would be too great, Erna's contempt unbearable, and still more so the silent kindness of her mother and of Paul.

Soon she had grown half accustomed to her existence. Full of misery and horrors as it might be, she was none the less free, and

could do exactly as she pleased. She could sleep until she chose, spend a long while dressing, and sometimes a more generous cavalier would take her to a Cinema or to a Bar. Yes, one got used to everything. Men were beasts, but she was something of a little beast herself! The main thing was money. "Now then, darling, how much? Five marks? No, thank you, nothing doing. Ten, and I'm yours! Come along, out with it."

"Patience!" thought she: "In a month I shall have saved enough to rent a nice little room. And soon I shall have enough for a fur jacket and so on." What always mastered the temptation to go home, was the eternal hope that one day she would meet a rich friend, with a car, and a villa at Grünewald. Then her troubles would be ended and her ambition achieved. She would be a great cocotte, over whom men raved, and for whom they shot themselves and committed crimes!

A young violinist, a charming dark boy who greatly reminded Lenchen of Paul, said to her one day: "Do you know why artists are attracted by girls of your sort? Because you lead a life just like ours, in continual conflict with necessity: but we are both gloriously free and live from adventure to adventure. Our experiences are spiritual and

yours are physical. But it is *va banque* with us both, until we grow famous or pass out." He meant it and he was right. She had often felt so, though she had no words to express her thought.

With clear-headed tenacity Lenchen Schwarzer, now known as "Dolly," pursued her appointed way. On the advice of a friend who liked her she had assumed a nickname. "Now," thought she contentedly at last, "the shop is open, and I'm doing business just like anybody else. What other girl of my age can say as much!"

XXV

The Schwarzer family and Reuscher sat in something near to silence round the kitchen table strewn with empty beer-bottles, and egg-cups out of which they had been drinking liqueurs. On a plate lay a few remaining sandwiches.

The scene looked very like a wedding-breakfast. Only Emil had a cheerful air. He did not feel the hostile atmosphere. The mother was always very silent in those days, and Paul was peevish because he could not go to meet Trudi. Emil did indeed think that Erna might have been a little more gay, and he laid his hand on her shoulder. His wife stared straight in front of her and flew into a temper when Ilse, the baby, began to cry in the living-room.

The widow went in and soothed the child, crooned over it in her thin, high voice and shook its celluloid rattle. Emil looked out at the far-off, transparent evening sky. Its milky blue, and a waft of warm air that came

through the half-opened window, heralded the Spring.

"I shall be so glad," said Emil to Erna, "when it's warmer, and we can go out into the country with Ilse."

Erna merely grimaced and said nothing.

"So you're going to live in the Prenzlauer Strasse to begin with, Emil?" said the widow, coming back into the kitchen.

Reuscher was soon forced to realize that his hope of a new and happy life with Erna was a delusion. It was true that even before their marriage she had been abrupt and domineering, but she had also been full of confidence in their common future. Now she always snubbed Emil and lost her temper when he came near her.

Paul reproached himself for not having warned his friend before. He now had to listen in silence while Erna abused him and rejected his marital claims with open contempt.

"No, thank you, no more brats for me. Ilse makes quite enough trouble!"

And when her husband finally lost patience she hit him in the face with his hat or whatever came to hand.

Emil became more and more self-absorbed,

and quickly lost the healthy colour that had begun to come back into his cheeks.

Paul again spent all day looking for work: but now with cheerful confidence. It was more than ever necessary for him to earn something, for love cost money. He would not take anything from Emil, who needed all he had for his own troubles.

Yet another hope drove the lad unwearied through the streets: the hope of meeting Lenchen. The marvels and the wide horizons of the new life that his companionship with Trudi had opened out to him, could not dispel the bitterness of the old one. He must bring Lenchen back or his mother would never be happy again.

However, he failed in both his quests: his search for his sister and for work was vain.

Then came the time when the large shops were arranging their Spring displays. Paul, who had sent in his name in good time, was delighted to be taken on for three weeks by his old firm to walk the streets with sandwich-boards again. He could not meet Trudi until the evening, but he was able to give her a little money once in a while, though she always hated taking it. She needed it for her hungry sisters, and indeed that was the only reason that had driven her, in her dull despair, to Bolle.

Paul was also glad to walk the streets, because his occupation took him all over the city, and if he did not meet Lenchen, then, he thought, she could not be there. He scanned the pavements day after day and peered anxiously down the side streets.

At last, when the violet glow of an early Spring evening had hardly yet faded into darkness, and in the vaporous haze the red and yellow of the street lamps shone like dead flowers, at a street corner, among the hooting taxis, rumbling buses, and hurtling trams, stood a girl in a red jacket and a short white skirt, with a cheap bit of fur round her neck, and carelessly swinging a patent-leather vanity bag. From time to time she would go up to a man, pull at his sleeve, and whisper to him with coaxing, glittering eyes.

One of the procession that marched along the gutter with puppet-like precision leapt out of his place, rushed towards the girl, and seized her hands with a shout of " Lenchen ! "

She started back in dismay ; then her face set into a smile of bitter derision, and she stared at the board hanging from her brother's neck as though it were inscribed with some obscenity.

" What *are* you doing, darling ? oughtn't you to go on with your goose-step ? "

Paul gripped her hands even harder as she

tried to draw them away. "Lenchen, won't you come back to us? Think of our mother!"

"Schwarzer, what's the meaning of this?" shouted the leader of the file of sandwichmen. "Go back to your place at once."

The others watched the pair with vacant grins, and a little crowd of passers-by began to collect.

Paul noticed nothing; he looked implor-ingly into his sister's eyes under their stained lids: there was a hateful line about her mouth he had never seen before.

"I'll report you," said the leader.

"Lenchen!" begged Paul.

She had managed to tear her hands away. "Don't you make a row, darling. Every-body's looking at us"; and as she turned to go, she flung out: "If you really want me, you can come along to the Invalidenkeller later on. It'll cost you ten marks . . . !" And she was lost in the crowd.

Paul felt like one half stunned as he took his place in the file again, and walked on, with bent head.

The leader was a kindly fellow and said nothing about what had happened.

Paul said nothing of this encounter,—not even to Emil. No one should know what had happened to his sister. It was enough

that the image of a girl in a red jacket for many, many years came back into his mind, and chastened even his happiest hours.

A few days later, after supper, Erna said to Reuscher: "I think it would be much better if we parted, don't you? This is an awful life,—we don't suit each other a bit."

Emil grew even paler than usual and said nothing. Even the widow and Paul looked at Erna in alarm.

"You needn't be afraid of being turned into the street," pursued Erna, in the same contemptuous tone. "You can quite well go on living here. You get on very well with Mother and Paul. I shall get a room somewhere else. I can't live and die in this hole."

"But what about Ilse?" asked Reuscher.

"I'll take her with me. I won't burden you with anything of mine. . . . Well, what do you say?"

Emil merely nodded. His drawn face seemed to shrink and wither.

The mother said nothing either then or later. She had borne these children in pain; now she must let them go, one after another, and tear her heart out as they went. And

the last agony was greater than the first. It was as though her body were emptied of all blood and warmth and feeling. She felt like a husk: her inner vision had grown dark. Must she lose Erna too?

Next morning Emil had disappeared, without a word, and without leaving as much as a message for his friend. Paul understood: Emil could only live in commonplace comfort, he had no strength and courage in himself. Would he have a third try, or would he give up the fight?

Erna merely laughed coldly. On the first of the next month she departed with Ilse to a certain grocer who had known her for a long time and wanted to marry her. She visited her mother more and more seldom,—mainly, indeed, when she wanted something mended or washed.

XXVI

LATE in March Paul was again out of employment and had to go back to the daily torturing tramp in search of work that he never found. Trudi's cheerful encouragement merely added an agonizing bitterness to his sense of humiliation. For he, who so longed to make things easier for her, had to let her give him money.

From time to time, on fine Sundays in April and May, they went out to the Tegeler Forest. At first Paul vehemently refused to let his mother give him the eighty pfennigs for his tram fare.

"No, Mother," he said: "pay the milk with it. I oughtn't to have any amusements."

Then Trudi appeared, in a white dress, with bare arms, a dark rose in her straw hat, glowing with delight at the prospect of the trip to the woods and on the lake.

Paul would not give way, shut himself into his misery, and refused to look at their smiles or listen to their protests.

At last he shouted: "You two go! You're

earning money,—you deserve an outing on Sunday."

Trudi began to sob, picked up her straw hat in her thin pale hand, and hanging her head in disappointment, turned to go.

"Look, Paul," said his mother, and shook the boy out of his sullen humour.

When Paul saw his beloved's grief, which was his fault, he suddenly felt free—the stubbornness within him melted like a lump of ice in the sunlight. He flung his arms round her from behind, and kissed the soft down at the back of her neck.

They always looked for the loneliest paths. Crocuses, with their blooms still coyly half-opened, were scattered over the moist, dark carpet of pine-needles, and anemones, and, in the lush grass, shy companies of violets. Glimpses of blue sky shone through the rich brown pine-stems like fluttering blue silk pennons, and thrushes trilled and warbled. And, from time to time, the lovers would stop and kiss.

They spoke of their common future. They knew that it depended on some kind of miracle or favour, and none could tell at whose hands it would come to them, or what form it would take. Their thoughts and sensations were already so closely knit together that they both trembled lest the miracle might

be withheld, without needing to confess their fear.

Later on they took a boat and glided over the lake: the water was growing darker, and flecked with glowing strips of colour from the late afternoon sky, and lightly stirred by a cool wind.

Paul scarcely moved the oars. The purple glow of the setting sun gleamed like paint on his drawn features. He held the oars now motionless: the water dripped from the blades and gurgled under the gliding boat.

Trudi gazed uneasily into Paul's eyes. "Paul!" she cried.

"It's all so hopeless," he said dully.

"But, my dear, think what a lovely day we've had,—that ought to give us strength and confidence, oughtn't it?"

He shook his head heavily. "If a man can't work and stand on his own feet, he can't enjoy anything. There's no place for him in life."

The girl's eyes widened in an imploring appeal: then they grew stern,—almost menacing. Her hands reached out to him like the hands of a child, that feels helpless before the grief of a grown-up person.

Suddenly Paul sat beside her at the tiller, grasped her in his arms as though he were afraid she would escape him, and said in a strange

choking voice: "Trudi, do you love me so much that you couldn't live without me?"

The girl nodded in amazement.

"Would you die with me, if I couldn't go on living?"

Trudi quivered in his strangling embrace, her face stiffened, and her lips trembled, but not a word came. Then she bent her head on to Paul's shoulder and stroked his cold hand against her bare arm.

"Come!" cried the lad, his voice rang with something like exultation. "I've finished with it all. There's no air for me to breathe, no happiness in this world, and no place for the two of us. Let's just drop into the water like this with our arms round each other . . . and then it will all be over."

The boat was brushing against some reeds on the bank, the grey twilight was falling on the lake, and the mirror of the waters had grown dark. Birds, drunk with sleep, went sailing between the broad branches of the pines.

Paul gazed steadily at the small face of his beloved that lay so quietly against his hands. Her eyes were smiling under her closed lids, her lips curved and her eyebrows rose in the pain of surrender. She drew him closer and closer and pressed his ear against her warm breathing mouth.

"Come, Paul—love me, darling: find your

happiness in me, and there'll be place enough for our love."

"Trudi!" His tears fell upon her exultant face, and he kissed them away from her cheeks.

* * * * *

They drew apart; Paul raised Trudi's shoulders above the edge of the boat, set her softly against it, and lay down at her side. Her blond hair hung over and just touched the water.

Trudi opened her eyes. In them was no fear, no supplication, only a solemn trust in her lover. . . . Gently she put him from her, then drew him back, pulled herself up against the side of the boat and flung her arms about him. "Oh, Paul, let me be your life. . . . And now we must go, your mother will be anxious."

The lad nodded, went back to his seat, and with bent head rowed back to the little inn on the other bank. He felt small and mean beside this girl, and no longer worthy of her. He watched her as she sat there by the tiller, white and tall in the evening mist, and she seemed to him a being from another world. And he thought: "She has beaten me."

XXVII

The following weeks were a swaying fight between Trudi's love and his despair. And then Trudi was dismissed from the factory. She could not find work anywhere else, and now, instead of helping more at home, she was one more mouth to feed.

Paul begged his mother to take Trudi in. The widow said nothing for a long time, and sat with drawn, set lips. Her son looked at her in a torment of apprehension,—at the wandering grey wisps of hair that hung over her temples, as though dishevelled by a storm. The lad was seized by a sudden fear of his mother, sitting there huddled in her chair like a stone image of the huge stone city. Tears dripped one by one down the furrows in her cheeks.

Her son dropped weakly on to a chair in front of her.

The mother beckoned him to reach out his hand. "You know, Paul, how I love you both. But do you remember what I said to Emil and Erna when they wanted to live here?"

Paul said, Yes.

"Well, then," said the widow, "it's for the same reason that I can't have you and Trudi now. Do you want your children to go through what you have had to suffer?"

Paul bowed his head. Then his body quivered in a sudden access of fury: "Then isn't there any room for us in this huge city,—nowhere that we can earn a bare living?"

The mother, leaning forward motionless upon her chair, and staring into vacancy, shook her head.

The lad leapt up, and shook his fist like a drunken man.

"Oh, Paul . . . stop!"

"My God," he shouted: "we must smash all this! We won't live in rags and starvation much longer. . . ."

His eyes blazed as he glared at his mother, who was feebly stroking his arm.

Her caress gradually soothed him, he composed himself and murmured: "But it's so hopeless. . . . What can we do? Where can we live?"

"You might try somewhere else . . . the country perhaps," said his mother, knowing that things were just as bad there too.

Paul could only answer what she herself did not dare to confess: and in his helpless revolt he now turned against her. "You

don't mean to put us out into the street, do you?"

The widow got up. Her face stiffened into an impenetrable mask; and as Paul looked at her he felt shaken and afraid.

"Paul, my dear . . . go and fetch Trudi and her things."

Then she went to the sink and bent over the dishes that she had just washed. Her son must not see the smile of something like triumph that played about her lips.

Late that night, she softly opened the door of the inner room, clad in her husband's overcoat, and carrying the kitchen lamp in her hand. She looked cautiously across at the mattress on which Paul and Trudi lay, clasped in a close embrace. Paul's head had dropped on to the girl's shoulder as though he were whispering to her: and the lines of the girl's sleeping face were soft with gratitude and gladness.

There was a faint, shrill whistle from the gas-stove. The flame in the lamp began to flicker: the widow turned it lower and quickly blew it out.

Feeling a little giddy, she went to the nearest window, and looked at the few stars that she could see above the abyss of the four towering walls. In the uncertain twilight, her face was that of a praying child: and it was,

indeed, a prayer that came from her lips as she sank down on her knees by the window-sill:

"... And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us ... those that trespass against us. ..."

THE END

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